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Ed speak

SIRISH CHANDRAN

INDIA IS SUV COUNTRY. WHILE THE HIGHWAYS are expanding at an impressive rate, the roads within our cities are falling apart at an even more impressive one. Crabbing over speed breakers, wincing every time you hit a pothole, and having car spotters shoot your sports car while you're waiting for a tow truck to relieve you of the misery of a cut tyre is hardly the definition of fun. It's the reason why Lamborghini sells ten times as many Uruses as Huracans; why AMG sells more SUVs than cars. Except, that might not be the case for much longer.

Enter the 911 Dakar. This is a 911 with 80mm more ground clearance, long travel suspension, all-terrain tyres and all-wheel drive. Even a Rallye mode for going bananas on gravel and pulling launch control runs with 20 per cent wheel spin so you look like a rally god with rooster trails of dirt flying behind you. This is the very definition of a daily-driving sports car for India; one that you can even take to the Thar desert! Most importantly it has heritage, drawing direct inspiration from the 1984 Dakar-winning 911 SC. And you can even option it with the ridiculously cool livery that apes that of the Dakar winner.

Except you cannot, if you are in India. All 2,500 examples are sold out and India isn't — yet — a big enough market to command allocations of super-rare cars.

Take heart though. With demand being so evidently ridiculous, and with Porsche having gone the IPO route just like Ferrari, it won't be long before more rally-inspired sports cars roll out.

Until then, you'll have to dig a little deeper in your pocket for the Huracan Sterrato. Just two weeks after its global unveil the Sterrato was previewed to potential customers and orders have already been banked. And here's a stat that blew my mind — its ground clearance of 177mm is just 3mm shy of the Slavia's 180mm. Imagine what you can do with the 602 horses from that spectacular V10. Who needs an Urus?

Of course the Lambo and Porsche are way up in the stratosphere but that's where tech and concepts are first previewed, market reaction gauged, and then it all filters down to cars the rest of us can buy. Plus it revives long dormant dreams. Mine was to get hold of my very first car, failing which any Ambassador, and resto-mod it with rally raid-inspired underpinnings. Maybe now put Himalayan Rally-inspired livery and create India's own 911 Dakar! ☒

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Contents

REGULARS

006
IGNITION
Two supercars with dreams of going off-road headline the news section this month – the 911 Dakar and Lamborghini Sterrato. We've also brought you details on the new electric Macan, Porsche's Formula E plans, Pravaig's new SUV, the revived BMW 3.0 CSL and the Force Urbania

032
FIRST DRIVES
032 AUDI Q3
038 MERCEDES-BENZ EQB + GLB
044 BMW X7
048 BYD ATTO 3
054 JEEP GRAND CHEROKEE
060 PORSCHE 718 CAYMAN GT4 EPERFORMANCE

064
COLUMNS
Bijoy Kumar, Aatish Mishra, Jethro Bovingdon & Richard Porter

068
SUBSCRIPTIONS
*Get 12 issues of **evo** for just ₹1800 – each delivered early to your door – and enjoy a free gift too!*

133
FAST BIKES
134 UPFRONT
All the latest news on two wheels plus all the latest bike launches
136 COLUMNS
Rishad Cooper and Vijay Parmar
138 INDIA BIKE WEEK
IBW returns to Goa in 2022!
142 RIDERMANIA
RE's biggest gathering of the year
144 IVOOMI JEET
iVoomi's flagship retro EV tested
155 KYTE MAGNUM
This or an entry level ICE scoot?
146 TVS RACING DIARIES
Getting astride TVS Racing's most advanced race bike

150
MOTORSPORT
A new rally champion is crowned at the INRC, and the Indian Racing League kicks off at the Hyderabad street circuit

153
EVO FLEET
The Audi Q7 leaves the fleet and we bring you updates on the Hyundai i20 N Line and Royal Enfield Hunter

167
DEAD ON ARRIVAL
A stillborn Group B contender

168
TRIED AND TESTED
We test new suspension on the Thar, CEAT CrossDrive tyres, Rynox Navigator and the Fitbit Inspire 3

177
NEXT MONTH
Kicking off the new year with our biggest feature – eCOTY

180
GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN
Before the GLB, we had the Mercedes-Benz B-Class!

FEATURES

070

FERRARI SP3

Following the SP1 and the SP2 in Ferrari's super exclusive Icona series, the Daytona SP3 pays homage to the gorgeous P4 endurance racer from the '60s. With a mid-engined V12 set in the LaFerrari Aperta's carbon tub, and draped in what is possibly the finest shape we've seen on the road in a long time, the SP3 is the stuff of dreams

082

BLAST FROM THE PAST

The Daytona SP3 is inspired by Ferrari's racers of the '60s. We take a trip down memory lane and recall the stories that made those cars the legends they are today

088

RISE TO THE CHALLENGE

In 2023, Ferrari will be gunning for the overall win at Le Mans in its hypercar, while a 296 GT3 will take over in the lower classes. We roadtrip to La Sarthe and in the process, attempt to understand the shift from the current gen 488 to the 296 on track, and the challenges that the 296 needs to overcome to deliver at the level that the tifosi expect of it

096

GREAT INDIA DRIVE

A convoy of Hyundai Tucsons attempts to cross a snowed in Zoji La — which literally means the pass of blizzards. Do they live to tell the tale?

102

DAKAR DREAMS

Getting behind the wheel of a Dakar race buggy isn't something we do every day. This time around, it is Audi's technological tour-de-force, the RS Q e-tron

108

TOYOTA INNOVA HYCROSS

We get behind the wheel of Toyota's much awaited Innova HyCross — replete with its all-new platform, hybrid drivetrain and improved interiors

116

VW DESIGN BREAKDOWN

Designer Sudhir Sharma breaks down the Virtus' strong design

124

EVS CAN BE FUN!

We get behind the wheel of two of the latest EV concepts around: the Hyundai N Vision 74 and RN22e

130

AUDI TRACKDAY

Getting a taste of Audi's full blown RS cars — the RS 5 and the RS Q8 at the Buddh International Circuit

160

TUNED: NISSAN GT-R

Getting a first-hand experience of India's fastest Nissan GT-R. With plenty of serious performance parts, this car won the recent Valley Run drags with a sub 10-second time. And this was with a lift-off mid run!

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IGNITION

NEWS, INTERVIEWS, TECH AND EVERY NEW CAR THAT MATTERS

176 Rothmans PORSCHE
953 Roughroads PORSCHE
S QJ 911

Do you need

an SUV?

Porsche and Lamborghini just dropped what are possibly the most desirable cars of the year. The 911 Dakar and Huracán Sterrato inject some genuine off-road ability into two iconic supercar line-ups. What's not to love?

Desert power

Porsche takes lessons from its history and creates the maddest 911 we've seen in years

A PORSCHE 911 IS MORE OFTEN than not the only car you could ever need. Porsche knows this better than anyone, and to prove it beyond doubt, they decided to race it in the Paris-Dakar Rally in 1984. The 959 Rally was still in development, so for that first effort, Porsche took a bog standard 911 that had been jacked up and made more reliable, christened the 911 Rally (953) and set it loose on the world's toughest car rally stage.

For 2022, Porsche looked at the 953 with nostalgic eyes and decided that the world needed a revival of the insanity of the '80s, if only for a moment before the electric age truly kicks in. The Porsche 911 Dakar is a tribute to the 1984 Dakar victory achieved by René Metge and Dominique Lemoyne. That car was a stop-gap before Porsche devised the devilishly capable 959 Rally, which brought it even more success, especially at the hands of legendary driver Jacky Ickx. However, a stop-gap which won the notorious Paris-Dakar at its first go, when the rally was using its original, unforgiving route. That was also the race when Mark Thatcher, the son of the sitting British Prime Minister, got lost, leading to an international diplomatic scramble to find him. No easy race to win, then.

This new car packs a 3-litre biturbo straight six in typical Porsche fashion, making 473bhp and 570Nm of torque. This helps the 911 Dakar reach 100kmph in just 3.8 seconds, all the way up to a top speed of 240kmph. The original 953 was the first all-wheel-drive Porsche, and the 911 Dakar continues that legacy along with an 8-speed PDK gearbox. The 911 Dakar has been made to be as capable off-road as any 911 is on-road, and so it has two new driving modes to add to the pizazz. Rally mode helps you drive faster on loose gravel surfaces along with a rear-biased all-wheel-drive setting, while off-road mode raises the ground clearance for optimal performance on any terrain. They are accompanied by a Rallye Launch Control, which improves starts on loose surfaces and allows wheel slippage of only '20 per cent'.

> **THE ORIGINAL 953 WAS THE FIRST AWD PORSCHE, AND THE 911 DAKAR CONTINUES THAT LEGACY**

But the truly special abilities of the car come around when you look at the off-road specific upgrades. Ground clearance has been hiked up by 50mm. With a lift system, that can be further jacked up by 30mm. With its 'high level' mode, you can comfortably cruise on the dunes at 170kmph, and the 911 Dakar won't bite. Massive Pirelli off-road tyres, 19-inches at the front and 20 at the rear complete the job with spectacular ease.

Porsche knows its buyers better than anyone, and so it is offering the 911 Dakar with special accessories such as a roof basket and roof tent, able to carry 42kg of the best caviar

Roughroads
PORSCHE
953

by TRAYAMBAK CHAKRAVARTY

Left: The typical 911 cockpit remains untouched but comes with lightweight options such as the rear seat delete as standard. **Right:** This is not a 911 that shies away from dirt

out there. And of course, a rally car needs rally lights. Porsche gives you four of those with aplomb. Even with the upgrades, Porsche says "Lightweight glass and a lightweight battery reduce its weight further, enabling the Porsche 911 Dakar to weigh in at just 1,605kg — a mere 10kg heavier than the 911 Carrera 4 GTS with PDK." Work to be proud of indeed. The 911 Dakar is wider, more aggressive and capable than any 911 has been — for the purpose it has been built for.

The 953 was also known for its Rothmans racing livery, and so Porsche has also offered the Rothmans colours as a special option — for a price of course. Called the Rally design package, it should be the default choice for anyone buying this special machine. According to Porsche, "This is the first time that Porsche has implemented the combination of bi-colour paint and decorative foiling in series production. On the side of the vehicle, the customer can choose an individual race number between 0 and 999." Godsent words for racing fanatics.

Any 911 is special, and this 911 is even more so. Harry Metcalfe says about his own 911 Turbo, "You can chase perfect handling or refinement, but sometimes the car you actually want to own is the one with the quirky nature." Quirky would be the ideal term to describe a car such as the 911 Dakar, with more personality and history behind it than most car manufacturers have in their entire inventory.

Unfortunately, the 911 Dakar won't be coming to India, as even with 2,500 units slated for production, none are allocated to the country. The news is galling especially when Lamborghini has already sent word that the new Huracan Sterrato will be allocated to India. A 911 with the off-road chops that the Dakar has would be a godsend in India, not just because of the road conditions but also for the sheer pleasure and unusual reverence of driving a 911 at full blast across the best off-road tracks and trails that India has to offer, from the Thar desert to the Himalayas and further. By any metric, if a car can do as well on the Buddh International Circuit as it can on the unhinged sands of the Thar, then truly, that is the only car you could ever need. The 911 Dakar could be that car. ◼

The dust settles

The Lamborghini Huracán Sterrato goes where no low slung raging bull has gone before

I REALLY DIDN'T THINK THEY WOULD do it. I mean, Lamborghini did show us the Sterrato concept back in 2019 but then how many supercar concepts have come and gone, without seeing the light of day? I thought it would be another one of those. Forgotten in the annals of unrealised concepts. Relegated to Google image searches of some 12-year-old enthusiast searching 'rally Lamborghini' a decade from now. Something we'd look back on when Porsche brought out its off-road 911 and said, "Hey, wouldn't it have been cool if Lambo had put that Sterrato thing into production?"

Well, news flash. They did. Days after the 911 Dakar was unveiled, Lamborghini announced that they were joining this new spangled all-terrain supercar club with the Huracán Sterrato. It's a car that means proper business, with proper off-road ability. Or in the case of India, simply the ability to drive around without needing to wince at every unsighted pothole. There are serious changes to the chassis, tyres, engine, electronics to make this bona fide supercar platform into a dirt-track slayer.

Most obvious is the jacked up ride height — a whole 44mm higher than the Huracán Evo on which it is based, taking clearance to a cool 177mm. The Skoda Slavia has 179mm, for context. The whole suspension has been revamped to deal with the unique challenges that this car would face. Yes, it has longer travel, with the front going up by 25 per cent while the rear goes up 35 per cent. The track widths have increased (+30mm front, 34mm rear) and so has the wheelbase (9mm).

The underbody has been given suitable reinforcement with an aluminium skid plate, and with a sturdier lip, diffuser and side skirts. There's additional cladding over the wheel arches that cover up that extra track width on both axles. There's a roof-mounted scoop that *by* AATISH MISHRA

Above: Roof scoop feeds straight into the air intakes; the Sterrato runs 19-inch wheels with all-terrain tyres that allow it to perform on both tarmac and off-road

CLICK TO WATCH THE YOUTUBE VIDEO
evo

HURACAN
Sterrato

feeds straight to the air intake so the car is always breathing clean air. It also runs 19-inch wheels, with all-terrain Bridgestone Dueller tyres that promise to deliver Lamborghini-levels of on-tarmac performance, while delivering traction on loose surfaces.

As for the engine, it carries over the V10 from the Huracán Evo — that spectacular, nape-tingling 5.2-litre V10 in all its naturally aspirated glory mated to an AWD system. No RWD antics here. In terms of power, it makes 602bhp and 560Nm, a shade lower than the current spec of this engine in the Evo. Not that this makes it a slouch — 0-100kmph comes up in a rapid 3.4 seconds. That said, top speed is just 260kmph and this is likely due to the tyres being W-rated (that have a top speed capability of 270kmph). The electronics have also received their fair share of updates with the Strada and Sport mode being updated to suit the use-cases of this car and the Corsa mode making way for Rally mode — a dedicated mode that harnesses all of the capabilities of the car, right from the engine and chassis to the electronic aids with one single goal: fun off-road.

Incidentally, the Sterrato is the last-ever pure ICE car that will be launched by Lamborghini. Come next year, we're going to have to brace ourselves for some form of electrification. The Sterrato is limited to 1,499 cars globally making it fairly exclusive, but unlike the 911 Dakar, we will see them on our roads very soon. Sharad Agarwal, head of Lamborghini India, refuses to put down an exact number but he has made it clear that they will be bringing it into the country "in good numbers". Double digits, possibly. Priced at ₹4.61 crore, it is far from the most expensive Huracán on sale right now but he expects owners to go wild personalising it. And with cars such as these, the sky is the limit.

as told to AATISH MISHRA

"We want to bring new models faster to the market"

We caught up with Sharad Agarwal, head of Lamborghini India at the Lamborghini Lounge in Doha on the sidelines of the FIFA world cup

2022 has been an exciting year

"We started the year with the unveiling and delivery of the Huracán Fluo Capsule. Then we delivered the first Lamborghini in the Shillong region. So reaching a lot more Tier I, Tier II cities. Then we delivered four Ultimaes, four out of 650 in the world. We launched the Tecnica in August, Performante last month and now it's the Sterrato, eight days after the global launch. It's very exciting. We always say we want to bring the new models faster to the market and we are demonstrating this. We are also saying that we want to bring limited edition Lamborghinis to the market and we are also demonstrating that. Then, on the experiences. We had the Lamborghini Day. We celebrated 400 Lamborghinis in India, then we celebrated 200 deliveries milestone for Urus, the fastest 200 by any super luxury marque in the market. We had six chapters of Bull Runs in India. It's a new concept where we are promoting drive with mental health among our consumers. We also curated exclusive nights of Lamborghini with celebrity chefs, especially curated meals and experiences."

The pillars of growth

"We are focusing on three key pillars strategy for the market. The first of it is that we want to bring new models faster to the market. We want to deliver to our clients in India the new models around the same time we are delivering to their counterparts in other parts of the world. When we launched the Urus in 2018 initially we were in the top five markets in the world to launch the car. When we launched the Evo, we were the first market. Now, they will be among the first few in the world to see the Sterrato here. This is one pillar. The second is that we want to curate experiences for our customers to give them the authentic Lamborghini lifestyle. So we have the Lamborghini Giro, where we bring the experience of the Thrill of Driving and lifestyle on some of the best roads in the country. We have experiences such as Lamborghini Day. This year we celebrated the milestone of 400 Lamborghinis in India, in Goa, showcasing the culture, the lifestyle and the authentic experience of that city to our customers. We did the same in 2019 in Jaipur. Then we are doing something like Bull Run. We also have track experiences where we show the technology leadership and the lifestyle of the brand to our customers. We have lounge experiences curated for our customers. So we are constantly seeing how we give the most unique ownership experience. The third pillar is to focus to expand our geographic and demographic reach. We have activated more than 100 cities and today we have Lamborghini owners in more than 50 cities in the country. These cities are contributing to more than 25 per cent of our volume in India. Then we are seeing more and more first-generation entrepreneurs, people from the startup ecosystem, women buyers today coming and buying Lamborghinis in India."

"THE SEGMENT IS STILL SMALL, THE PROFILE OF THE BUYER HAS REALLY EVOLVED"

Interest levels for limited editions are higher

"Lamborghini is a dream car for our customers. It's a car which people buy not for commuting from point A to B but as their aspiration, an extension of their lifestyle, extension of their personality. When they are buying a Lamborghini, they don't want to buy a Lamborghini, they want to buy their own Lamborghini. When it comes to these limited edition models or unique cars, something as exciting as the Sterrato, the interest level is much higher because it is much more unique and it's going to be rare. That's why whenever we announce any limited edition models, we see that there is a lot more response and excitement that comes from both customers as well as new prospects. This is a very positive trend because it clearly shows that while the segment is still small, the profile of the buyer has really evolved in the market. They really want a Lamborghini that is reflecting their lifestyle, their personality, which is unique to them. A Lamborghini which is limited increases their preference further." ■

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Meeting the icons

Classic Porsches, modern Porsches, motorsport legends – all packed in to one evening on the sidelines of the regional launch of the 911 Dakar

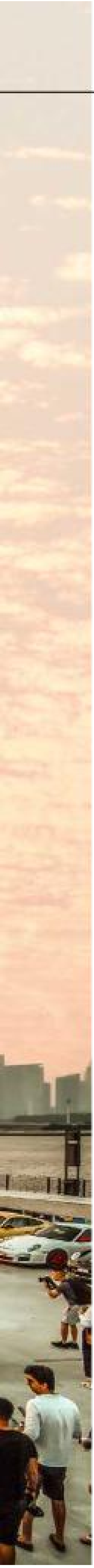
IT WAS ABSOLUTELY SURREAL. I was sitting in the backseat of my cab, driving into the Icons of Porsche event in Dubai. We'd just passed a sea of 911s in what seemed like a makeshift parking lot, and I was already drooling a little — it doesn't take much when it comes to Porsches, to be honest. A flash of blue caught my eye — low slung, wide, with those unmistakable top pipes — that was a friggin' 918 Spyder casually gliding along beside us. Jaw. Hit. Floor. Icons of Porsche, they call it? Couldn't have picked a more appropriate name.

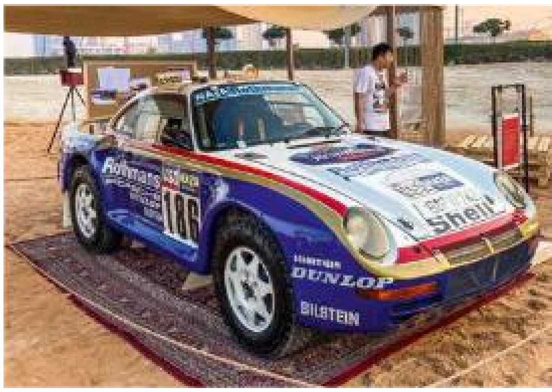
What was Icons of Porsche, anyway? It was a celebration of all things Porsche! The cars, the people, the community. It was a heady mix of owners coming together with enthusiasts, iconic cars from the museum, and even its brand ambassadors in the mix. Walk into the event and the first thing you see is a 924 GTS Rallye that was piloted by none other than Walter Rohrl. This wasn't the first time I was coming up close to this car — I had once seen it at a special Walter Rohrl exhibition at the Autostadt in Wolfsburg a couple of years ago. What I hadn't seen before were the other classics on display from Porsche's own museum in Stuttgart — there was the 911 SC San Remo, a Safari-spec 911 and a 356 that participated in the Peking-Paris rally. Talk about right place, right time — we were standing right behind the Safari when the dudes from the museum who maintain the car popped the ducktail spoiler, sprayed starting fluid straight into the throttle bodies and fired it up. Raw, guttural, unhinged — I'd heard flat-sixes before but never a motorsport one. I might have had a semi.

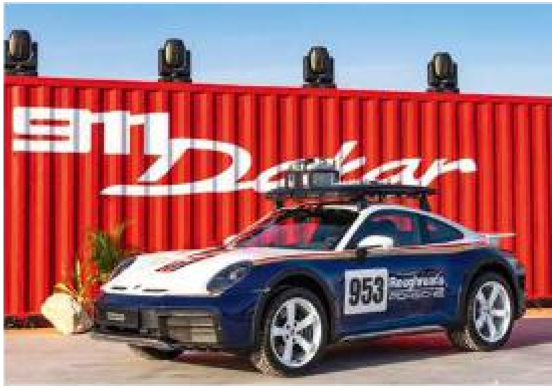
I'D HEARD FLAT-SIXES BEFORE BUT NEVER A MOTORSPORT ONE

The star of the show, without a doubt, had to be the 959 Dakar. This car won the Dakar in 1986 — the very car in front of me — and it had been preserved in the same way that it finished the race. The patina, the scuffed bumpers, they all told a story. At the time, the 959 was the most technologically advanced car with a super-complicated four-wheel-drive system. And for a sportscar-based rally car to win the Dakar? It is a feat that hasn't been replicated since.

by AATISH MISHRA







Clockwise from above: A few GT3 RS' against the Dubai skyline; the actual Dakar-winning 959; the 911 Dakar with a livery inspired by the 959; the classic cars drew in plenty of crowds; there were a couple of Carrera GTs on display. **Facing page, top:** The festival had cool artwork like this ducktail on display

The car on display was driven by Rene Metge and co-driver Dominique Lemoyne, and a sister car driven by Jacky Ickx and Claude Brassuer came second. Incidentally, Jacky Ickx was at the event too — the weekend would also host the regional unveiling of the new 911 Dakar (you can read all about it on page 8), with Jacky sharing some of his stories of driving the 959 at the Dakar!

"You have to imagine — in the desert and the mountains in Algeria, or in Niger or wherever, there are no traffic lights, signs, whatever. The stage can be 800km. It is flat-out. You have a road book, you follow the road book. Those 800km, you sometimes do in 10 hours. You have no time to rest. No time to refuel. No time to refill the water. It's just a non-stop fight for three weeks," he said, while addressing the huge crowd that had amassed around the stage to listen to him. The guy is 77 years old, but he was strutting around the place, checking out the cars on display, greeting the endless fans with the energy of someone half his age. Legend. Absolute legend. Mark Webber, former F1 racer and Le Mans winner, was around along with Timo Bernhard, the madman who set the all-time record around the Nurburgring in the 919 Evo.

One section that was so deeply impressive were the 'Icons of the Region', and it gives you a massive insight into the sort of collectors that the Middle East has. There were a couple of 918 Spyders, a Carrera GT, epic cars such as the 911 GT2, possibly every iteration of the GT3 and GT3 RS — the works. It wasn't just new metal, I lost count of the number of 930 Turbos, there was a gorgeous 356 Zagato in addition to a number of other 356s, and there was even a Porsche diesel tractor. These people have proper taste, here.

A lot of bucket list stuff was ticked off for me. I heard someone blip the Carrera GT's V10 engine, possibly the sweetest engine note I've ever heard. I came face to face with the 997 GT3 RS — a car that I had a poster of as a child, and one that started this love affair of mine with Porsches. I got a picture with Jacky himself. And I got to see the 911 Dakar in the flesh — jacked up, adorned in both Martini and Rothmans colours — it looks absolutely gorgeous. That iconic shape, reinforced to take on the dunes makes me weak in the knees. Such an absolute pity that they are not coming to India.

The guys over at Porsche tell me that this year's event was exponentially bigger than last year's. They even had to shut registrations because they were going over capacity. There's a very high chance that next year's, if it happens, will be even bigger. Frank advice from one car enthusiast to another? Go attend. Flights to Dubai aren't all that expensive. ☒

PRAVA
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WORDS by ANAND MOHAN

Can it defy the odds?

Indian EV startup Pravaig Dynamics' big dreams rest on the Defy SUV capturing the imagination of luxury SUV buyers

BENGALURU-BASED EV STARTUP Pravaig Dynamics has launched its first electric SUV, the Defy at ₹39.5 lakh, ex-showroom. The Defy gets a dual-motor setup and all-wheel-drive as standard and it is also available in a more offroad-focused version dubbed the 'Veer', for military use. The catch is, you can't test one until the third quarter of next year, which is when the company plans to officially start deliveries. Nevertheless, if you are willing to shell out ₹51,000 to book one, here's what you need to know about the SUV.

The Defy will get a dual motor setup with all-wheel-drive, making 402bhp of power and 620Nm of torque. The company claims over 500km on a full charge and that the battery supports 150kWh of fast charging, giving it 80 per cent juice in just 30 minutes. On a standard 7kWh home charger the SUV will take about 8 hours to be fully charged. The battery life is a claimed 2.5 lakh kilometres.

The Defy will have a top speed of 210kmph, promises to do a 0-100kmph sprint in 4.9 seconds and with its 234mm of ground clearance, has 900mm of water-wading ability. At the launch of the vehicle, Pravaig claims to have tested the vehicle in and around Bengaluru and in Rajasthan over 50,000km, and component level testing is completed. The interior is yet to be finalised and going by the overall design, the exterior needs a fair bit of fine tuning as well.

Above: The Defy SUV at launch is still a concept, with deliveries starting Q3, 2023. **Below:** The Veer is based on the Defy but targeted for military use only

Pravaig is working on its first electric car, and it has taken over a decade to launch a car that isn't production ready yet. The company claims its batteries have over 2,500 charge/discharge cycles and will come with a ten-year/5-lakh kilometre warranty. While on the component front, even if we give them the benefit of doubt to have tested these components extensively, on-road testing is critical and there's a long way to go before ARAI approvals are granted. The Q3 2023 launch timeline looks difficult as a result, which makes the early price announcement baffling in such an inflationary environment. ■

by ROHIT NALAWADE

Midtown madness

McLaren Automotive has officially entered the Indian market with the inauguration of its first dealership in Mumbai

McLAREN AUTOMOTIVE, THE BRITISH supercar-maker has officially made its entry into the Indian market, inaugurating its first showroom in Mumbai. The move is one of global significance, with McLaren Mumbai being the marque's 120th dealership globally, and the 41st dealership in the Asia-Pacific market. India is a burgeoning market for supercar makers, and considering the demand that it represents, Infinity Cars, a dealership already associated with high-performance and luxury brands will be the exclusive importer for McLaren supercars in India. Commenting on the occasion, Lalit Choudhary, the chairman and managing director of McLaren Mumbai said, "We are honoured to commence our journey as McLaren Mumbai and have it in our offering." Lalit went on to add, "We are confident that we can deliver McLaren's engineering excellence with a customer-centric proposition to ensure that we continue to exceed the expectations of our discerning clientele."

The launch of the dealership itself was an event buzzing with excitement. On display were three of McLaren's most eclectic models, starting off with a McLaren GT in stealthy black. Interestingly, even prior to McLaren's official entry into our markets, the 611bhp grand tourer has already gained popularity in Bollywood circles! Things only got more exciting moving to the 720S Spider finished in a fiery MSO bespoke red. For those of you not familiar with MSO or McLaren Special Operations, this a special arm of McLaren that caters to the most discerning buyers, unlocking a new level of customisation to make sure that each McLaren is specced as per an owner's unique taste.

MCLAREN MUMBAI IS THE 120TH DEALERSHIP GLOBALLY

The showstopper of the event was a very special limited-run model, a 765LT Spider finished in MSO bespoke delta red, claimed to be the only example of its kind! Based on the 720S and available in coupe as well as convertible form, the 765LT is 80kg lighter than the 720S and it also packs in more downforce. Want to get your paws on one? Too late, as the 755bhp (or 765PS), 330kmph missile is already sold out! In addition to the coupe and convertible versions of the above models, McLaren's India lineup will also feature the Artura hybrid, slated to launch in early 2023. The company also announced its MSO programme and its Arctic driving experience, with the latter allowing participants to master driving a McLaren at the Arctic circle.

Above: Paul Harris, MD, APAC and China, McLaren Automotive (L) and Lalit Choudhary, chairman and MD, McLaren Mumbai (R) pose with 765LT Spider

It's clear that McLaren has big ambitions in India, especially considering the popularity that Ferraris, Lamborghinis and Porsches command in our market. But with McLaren's spaceship-resembling offerings now joining the fray, it's safe to say that the streets of Mumbai at least are likely to be a playground of supercars and their midtown madness! ☒

McLaren
McLaren

"Our long term strategy must be based on not only the ICE models but also electric models"

We get talking to Petr Solc, the new director – sales and marketing at Skoda Auto India about the current lineup of cars and future plans

Taking over the reins

"I'm not completely new to the Skoda business in India. In the years 2016 to 2020, I was responsible for the region overseas, including India from a regional perspective from the headquarters, as a regional head. So I had certain interactions with India because India was one of the biggest markets for Skoda overseas at that time. So I have had interaction with the team, interaction also with the dealer network and also had the opportunity every quarter to travel to India. But of course, it's different to manage the country... And yeah, definitely what I can say is that the Skoda brand has done an incredible job over the last couple of years and the numbers speak for themselves. This year for the first time, Skoda will be breaking the 50,000 mark in terms of sales and also then in terms of the product — the successful introduction of the Kushaq last year and the successful introduction of Slavia at the beginning of this year. And these products have been also recognised by the GNCAP. The Kushaq as the safest family car and then the Slavia as the sedan of the year. So, yeah, definitely a great achievement so far for Skoda on the Indian market that I am really proud of. And I really also give big credit to my team and also to my predecessor for all of this."

as told to SIRISH CHANDRAN

Right: Petr Solc, the director for sales and marketing for Skoda India takes over from Zac Hollis after his four year stint in the country

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ANNIVERSARY EDITION
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Safety is our core

"Safety is part of our DNA in many markets globally for Skoda and therefore I am very proud that the Kushaq got a five-star rating, as the best-in-class, safest family car and a five-star rating for the front and also rear seat passengers. This is the first car that has ever been tested with five stars for both adult and child occupants. So yeah, definitely this is part of our long-term strategy going forward to provide best-in-class, safest cars to Indian customers."

Slavia will be just as safe

"As the Slavia is the same platform as the Kushaq, that also means Slavia is the safest sedan on the market. What we are providing at the moment with Octavia, Kodiaq and Superb, all these cars have a five-star rating in Europe. So I'm quite confident about saying that we have the safest cars on the market."

Skoda's EV plans

"We do have an electric car in our portfolio globally and Skoda has started with Enyaq in Europe. Plus already the first markets outside of Europe are getting the car. We are definitely watching the space in India in terms of the infrastructure, charging stations. And if everything is really evolving as it is so far, then also for us as Skoda India, we have a high intention to bring the Enyaq to the Indian market. The intention is definitely within the horizon of one to two years to bring it to the market — in 12 to 18 months. Definitely not immediate, but we do have certain plans. We are watching the space as to how the whole outside infrastructure in India will evolve. And yes, the car is ready. It's all to catch the right moment."

Skoda in new segments

"The Indian market is evolving and developing very quickly. Already this year, the tough market will be breaking a new record, 3.6 million units in a full year and definitely will also grow further. So I believe that the car market can reach 4 million in the foreseeable future within two years. And as Skoda, we would like to be part of this growth. So, for us, on top of India 2.0, on top of the existing lineup of parts and components, we would like to bring new products on the road. And definitely, we have a couple of options, a couple of scenarios. We are also watching the development of the segments. Some segments are developing faster than others. And out of these options and the tools out of the toolbox, we would like to then take the best of the best and bring it to the Indian customers."

"WE HAVE A HIGH INTENTION TO BRING THE ENYAQ TO THE INDIAN MARKET"

Localisation will be key

"We have a couple of options that we are exploring and it can really definitely be something we are discussing on localisation. Some new products we will be bringing will be localised but as I said, we have a couple of options at the moment on what to bring. But on top of this as a localised car, we are also discussing how to enhance our parts and components portfolio in the ICE market. This is our additional part of the ICE strategy and on top of that we would like to also investigate the opportunities in electric. So definitely we already talked about the Enyaq but definitely our long term strategy must be based on not only the ICE models but also electric models. If, of course, the development of electrification in India intensifies."

We will bring more Kodiaqs

"With the Kodiaq this year we had some supply constraints and unfortunately, we couldn't supply as many cars that were really deserved and also demanded by the customers. But for next year we will be bringing much more of a Kodiaq supply. And then we have the Superb and Octavia. We are still having a discussion of course about bringing these cars to Indian customers. BS6-I is finishing at the end of March but we are still having a discussion with our headquarters on how and in which form to bring these products to India and not give up on them."

Octavia RS is an option

"On the Octavia, we definitely had the RS which was a successful special edition and it's one of the options that we are investigating as well, as it was quite a unique USP for us to bring the RS. I believe it would find many customers in the Indian market as well. So yes, it is one of the options that we could have for the Indian market."

Macan to go fully electric

Porsche's smallest SUV will transition to a full EV next year, underpinned by the new PPE platform

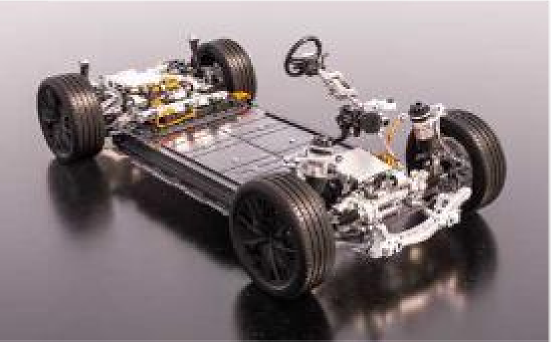
PORSCHE MACAN ELECTRIC

by SIRISH CHANDRAN

SPORTINESS HAS BEEN A KEY VIRTUE of Porsche's best-selling model and the brand insists that this will be further enhanced when the SUV transitions to a full-electric powertrain next year. At the e-Performance workshop at the Porsche Experience Centre at Franciacorta in Italy, the brand revealed key technical details of the electric SUV, and topping the list is the new PPE platform.

Co-developed with Audi, the Macan will be the first recipient of the Premium Platform Electric, an architecture that offers enough room for manoeuvre in the wheelbase, track width and ground clearance so as to underpin a variety of models including the electric Cayenne and the Audi A6 e-tron. Porsche, though, are keen to highlight the flexibility that the PPE offers, enabling the sporty brand to retain, what they term a 'strong, independent character'. While PPE offers the option of both rear- or all-wheel-drive, initially only AWD will be offered with the front motor decoupled during cruising or coasting to conserve energy. Unique to Porsche is the 'Performance rear axle' where the rear motor is mounted even further behind for a slightly rear-focused 48 to 52 per cent weight balance (the Taycan is 49:51 front to rear). Combined with dynamic torque distribution and rear-axle steering, this promises even greater agility especially while accelerating out of corners.

For the first time there's two-valve shock absorbers that offer a greater spread of damper characteristics along with claims of better comfort because they can be adjusted independently of each other via the Porsche Active Suspension Management (PASM) system. This also means you will notice even bigger differences between Comfort and Sport models on the PSM. These dampers can be paired with either air suspension or steel springs while the suspension will combine double wishbones at the front with a multi-link rear axle. Rear axle steering is another addition though at 5 degrees this is more conservative than what you will find on a Mercedes EQS. The staggered wheel sizes unique to the



Far left: The new PPE platform allows plenty of flexibility in terms of wheelbase and track widths, while housing the batteries in the floor

Macan will not only be carried over but also exaggerated to highlight the rear-focused weight distribution while wheel sizes can be optioned all the way up to 22 inches.

The steering has 15 per cent more direct ratio while the power steering has a Porsche-specific tune to identify and amplify information such as surface characteristics and tyre grip while filtering out disruptive vibrations and bumps. The most expensive versions will get an electronic locking rear differential to improve the torque vectoring and better harness the conceptual advantages of the twin motor electric powertrain (fast, precise all-wheel control and a fully variable and demand-based torque distribution between the front and rear axles).

OUTPUT WILL BE RAMPED UP TO NEARLY 600BHP AND 1000NM OF TORQUE

To put that chassis to work, the system output will be ramped up to nearly 600bhp along with a massive 1000Nm of torque. Similar to the Taycan, the Macan will use 800-volt technology along with permanently excited synchronous (PSM) electric motors on both axles. Compared to asynchronous motors (ASM), these deliver higher power and torque densities, greater efficiency and better reproducibility of the power output. To optimise effectiveness, silicon carbide (SiC) is used instead of silicon as the semiconductor material and that reduces switching losses in the pulse inverter (PWR) on the rear axle.

The PPE skateboard houses a lithium-ion battery consisting of twelve modules with prismatic cells and a total capacity of around 100kWh. It can be charged at an even higher capacity than the 270kW of the Taycan with a five to 80 per cent top-up in less than 25 minutes on a 350kW charger. This is in line with Porsche's EV philosophy that prioritises travel time when looking to balance range and performance; the 800-volt quick-charging capability bridging any perceived gaps in the range (no range figures for the Macan Electric have been revealed). Also unique is the Integrated Power Box that saves space and weight (and cost) by combining the on-board AC charger, the high-voltage heater and DC/DC converter.

With the prototype heavily masked it's hard to tell what the Macan Electric will look like with the only giveaway being the oblong-shaped LED headlights inspired by the Taycan. We will have to wait until the middle of next year to see the electric SUV in the metal, and early 2024 for deliveries to kick off. Porsche have also confirmed that the rumoured three-row full-electric SUV is also in the pipeline, the most expensive and largest Porsche in the range underpinned by the brand-exclusive SSP Sport platform, while the 718 Cayman/Boxster replacement will also go full electric, most likely on the PPE, ensuring that by 2025 more than half the range will be electrified (either fully or as plug-in hybrids) while by 2030 80 per cent will be fully electric. And key to hitting those targets and driving volume will be the Macan Electric. ☒

by ROHIT NALAWADE

Birthday special

The new BMW 3.0 CSL is a perfect homage to the 1970s original

2022 WAS A SPECIAL YEAR FOR BMW M, as it marked the 50th anniversary for the fabled motorsport division of a carmaker whose very lodestar is 'sheer driving pleasure'. The year-long birthday celebrations resulted in the launch of ten striking 50 Jahre M Edition limited run models, and as the year draws to a close, the most exciting of them all has been revealed — the 3.0 CSL, reborn in an all-new avatar. The original 3.0 CSL from the 1970s was a souped-up version of the 2800 CS, and it was the first car built by BMW M. It earned the infamous nickname of the 'Batmobile', owing to its aero kit with a rear spoiler that set it on a winning streak on European circuits as well as the IMSA championship in America.

IT HAS A LOT TO LIVE UP TO RATHER THAN JUST BEING AN HOMAGE

Left: The current-day 3.0 CSL continues to sport a spoiler worthy of the original 1970s car. **Left:** Livery is a throwback to BMW's motorsport success

Such a storied legacy means that the new 3.0 CSL has a lot to live up to rather than just being an homage to the original, and it surely delivers, with its eye-catching aero package and the double kidney grille that is reminiscent of the original. The party piece has to be under the bonnet, with the 3-litre straight-six engine borrowed from the M4 now making 552bhp and 550Nm, making this the most powerful straight-six to go into a road-legal BMW M car. Purists will be delighted to know that this engine can only be had with a 6-speed manual gearbox that sends power to the rear wheels, all the ingredients of a recipe that should make for ludicrous amounts of tyre smoke when going sideways!

All things must come to an end, and the new 3.0 CSL will just be a limited run model, with production for the sports car being limited to just 50 consecutively numbered units. And while looks are a personal subject, the modern-day 3.0 CSL is definitely one of the nicest looking Bimmers that I have ever seen, draped in the BMW Motorsport livery and sporting those gorgeous forged alloy wheels. But the fact remains that like the original, there's no denying that the homage would be a hoot to drive too — making you wonder why birthdays don't come more often!

Gen 3 Formula-E takes shape

Porsche is among the first teams to take the wraps off the Gen 3 racer. 99X gets new 469bhp powertrain, less weight, more efficiency and even quick charging

PERHAPS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE, and the main area of research in e-mobility, is the quest for efficiency and that has been the primary focus area with the third-generation of the Formula E single-seater electric racing series. Porsche were among the first of the teams to reveal its Formula E car, the 99X making its debut in Italy, and we got an opportunity to get an insight into the technical development of the season 3 cars — one that hasn't been without its challenges.

This being a race car the headline figure is of course the jump in power from 335bhp to 469bhp in qualifying mode and the motor is now not a spec-part but developed in-house by Porsche Motorsport. "The car is all about efficiency," says Martin Füchtner, technical project leader of the Formula E project. "We have more recuperation so less power is needed." Key to this is the newly added front motor that is used for recuperation and can add up to 250kW of (recuperated) energy to the 350kW (from the battery) on the rear axle. The resulting energy recovery with an output of up to 600kW (805bhp) is more than double the regenerative capability of the Gen2 vehicles. In fact recuperated energy accounts for more than 40 per cent of the power deployed during a race says Porsche. The recuperation is so strong that hydraulic brakes are no longer needed on the rear axle while the friction brakes are controlled by a brake-by-wire unit and balancing the two particularly ensuring consistency for the driver is a big challenge says Martin. "AWD recuperation is a key element but drivers need to have maximum trust in the brakes."

The batteries are also new, advances in cell technology making it smaller but allowing it to hold more capacity. The direct consequence is reduced overall weight of more than 50 kilos from the previous 903kg to under 850kg. There has also been a reduction in wheelbase (129.5mm), length (183.8mm) and width (100mm) making for a more agile car and better suited for wheel-to-wheel action on narrow street circuits. Porsche claims the increased outputs also lead to significantly greater acceleration and top speed, aided by the aerodynamics and new design of the Gen 3 racers, the most striking feature of which is the angular design and omission of the wheel covers — an overall theme now appealing more to the Playstation generation.

THE MOTOR IS NOW NOT A SPEC-PART BUT DEVELOPED IN-HOUSE

The chassis, batteries and aerodynamics are standard across Formula E with manufacturers and teams focusing their energies on the powertrain and cooling. Sustainability is a key talking point with the Williams Advanced Engineering batteries recycled or reused at the end of each season while the carbonfibre used in the chassis will be recycled from retired Gen-2 cars reducing the carbon footprint of production by more than ten per cent.

by SIRISH CHANDRAN & TRAYAMBAK CHAKRAVARTY

One facet of the Gen 3 cars that will not be seen at the start of the season is the ultra-high-speed charging that should add around 600kW of energy during the race — this is like the refuelling pitstops in Formula 1. This charging rate is almost twice as powerful as the world's most advanced commercial chargers and is one of the technologies that aims to be developed on the track for future use in road cars. But Martin says the key knowhow that will transfer to Porsche's next generation of electric road cars, and a key performance factor for the 99X, is software engineering — managing all-wheel-drive recuperation with the brake-by-wire friction brakes, handling all the reams of data real-time during the race weekend, policing power and torque deployment through the race, and mastering the control algorithms to race a more energy efficient race car. Efficiency, after all, is the key and with Gen 3 efficiency of the drivetrain goes up to 95 per cent and beyond compared to around 40 per cent for the best combustion engines.

Bottom: Martin Füchtner, technical project leader of the Formula E project at Porsche with the 99X

TAGHeuer
TAGHeuer

New beginnings

After three campaigns in Formula 2, Jehan Daruvala is now a part of the homegrown Mahindra Racing team

Mahindra
RACING
mahindra

JEHAN DARUVALA IS SWITCHING gears, and after three seasons in Formula 2, he will be joining Mahindra Racing as a reserve driver. The last season included his first feature race win and F1 tests with McLaren, but with no F1 seat in sight, this is the logical next step. Daruvala will support Oliver Rowland and Lucas di Grassi with race support and development of the brand's new car. He will also work at Mahindra Racing's Banbury HQ, helping engineers with the simulator.

As part of the job, Jehan will also be attending a few Formula E races next year, including the inaugural Indian E-Prix, to be held in February at Hyderabad.

Speaking about his appointment, Daruvala said, "To be a part of an Indian motorsport team is a dream come true. Formula E is very competitive, and I am really excited about this new chapter of my career. Season 9 promises to be very exciting with the all-new Gen 3 car and I am looking forward to learning and contributing, especially to car development and supporting the team. Mahindra Racing's pioneering efforts in promoting sustainability globally are commendable and I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute."

Asha Kharge, the chairperson of Mahindra Racing, was equally pleased, "We are delighted to welcome Jehan to our team. As a founding member, Mahindra Racing has diligently worked towards promoting Formula E globally and we are pleased to bring a young, accomplished Indian race driver to this fantastic sport. Jehan, with his experience and results across single-seaters, will add a great wealth of knowledge to our development programme. With Formula E's debut race in India, this is an especially exciting year for us, and we are excited to give the Indian fans a truly global experience."

With this, Jehan Daruvala becomes the second Indian driver to drive in Formula E as well as for Mahindra Racing after Karun Chandhok in the inaugural 2014 season.

by MANDAR SAWANT

Brute force 2.0

Say hello to the hugely promising Urbania LCV, Force Motors' latest salvo in the van segment!

Above: The Urbania gets three wheelbase options, ranging from a 10- to 17-seater configuration excluding the driver

FORCE MOTORS HAS UNVEILED THE Urbania, a new utility vehicle that has all the makings of becoming India's next favourite people mover. After all, the brand knows a thing or two about producing LCVs, with the Traveller being their most successful model. They've been producing it since 1987, and in due course have become India's largest van manufacturer! Despite its continued popularity, the Traveller is still a very traditional vehicle with a ladder frame chassis. The Urbania though is based on the next-generation T1N platform and will eventually replace the Traveller. It has a modular monocoque chassis that's designed with a two-box construction, that further reduces NVH in the passenger compartment compared to the Traveller. The Urbania will be a lot more comfortable over long distances as a result. There are three different wheelbase options available. 10 people, excluding the driver, can sit in the smaller one, which is 3350mm long. 13 passengers can be accommodated in the medium wheelbase version measuring 3615mm, while the range-topping third variant, which has the longest wheelbase at 4400mm, can house 17 people.

IT IS BASED ON THE NEXT-GEN T1N PLATFORM AND WILL EVENTUALLY REPLACE THE TRAVELLER

The only thing carried over from the Traveller is the Mercedes derived 113bhp/350Nm common-rail diesel engine. It has disc brakes all around and is the first vehicle in its class to have independent front suspension and rollover compliance, as well as airbags for the driver and co-driver. There's also an infotainment touchscreen supporting Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity.

Force Motors has invested ₹1,000 crore in this project. Technology experts and domain specialists from Italy, Spain, the UK, Germany, Japan and USA were roped in to improve, refine and validate this platform, with a target to export the Urbania to the Middle East, Africa, ASEAN and South American markets as well. But first, be prepared to see a lot of these rolling down our roads soon. ☒

by KARAN RAMGOPAL

Watches

This month's tastiest new timepieces

Accurist Origin Chronograph

From ₹19,100

accurist.com

British brand Accurist has hit the reset button and returned with a new logo and an entirely revamped range. Particularly standing out is the 'Origin' line-up, which takes inspiration from a 1970s Accurist best seller. It includes three-handed models (priced from ₹14,047) and chronographs (pictured) in a variety of colour schemes and with the choice of straps or integrated bracelets.

Turismo Le Mans Pilote Chronograph

₹70,239

turismo-watches.com

Turismo launched last year with a Swiss-made, motorsport-inspired chronograph called 'Tertre Rouge' that featured a steering wheel motif on its dial and caseback. Three more variations on that theme are now following and include colour schemes that should be familiar to endurance racing fans, as with this 'Le Mans Pilote' version.

TAG Heuer Carrera x Porsche RS 2.7

From ₹6.46 lakh

tagheuer.com

It was almost inevitable… Take TAG Heuer's Carrera model (59 years old and counting) and apply the colour schemes of Porsche's most famous Carrera, the RS 2.7 (currently celebrating its 50th birthday). The result: this blue and white version in stainless steel, or a red and white alternative in rose gold, both with Porsche's famous 'Carrera' script along the left-hand-side of the case.

*Prices excluding Indian duties and taxes

Ushering in the electric era

The EX90 is the company's flagship car, it's all-electric and the safest Volvo to date

VOLVO HAS TAKEN THE WRAPS OFF OF THE EX90, its new flagship SUV, the spiritual successor to the XC90. The seven-seater is proclaimed to be the safest Volvo to date and if history has taught us anything, this statement means a lot. In terms of design this is as Volvo as it gets. It has all the lines and design elements that you would come to expect from a Volvo. In their mission to get carbon neutral and be kinder to mother nature the SUV uses up to 15 per cent of recycled steel, 25 per cent of recycled aluminium and roughly 48kg of recycled plastic. Powering the EX90 is a twin permanent magnet motor system which powers all four wheels outputting 510bhp and 910Nm of torque. Powering these motors is a 111kWh battery which boasts 600km of WLTP range and can be topped up from 10 to 80 per cent in 30 minutes. The battery also supports bi-directional changing. Safety being the highlight of any Volvo, this one gets all your standard top-shelf safety kit plus new additions such as lidar. That, along with the myriad cameras, sensors and radars mean that this car will be able to detect obstacles well in advance and keep you in control. There are also a plethora of sensors which will detect when you are sleepy, tired or not as attentive as you should be and warn you accordingly. As with any other Volvo, this is just a very small part of the big fat list of safety features that the car comes kitted with. The infotainment and cockpit systems are powered by NVIDIA and Qualcomm along with Volvo's in-house algorithms and calibrations to make the experience that much more engaging. The EX90 plays a crucial part in Volvo's plan to go all-electric by 2030 and the means used to make the car will also play a role in Volvo as an entity achieving its target of becoming 'climate-neutral' by 2040. ☒

New arrivals

It's raining SUVs this month, with some special edition cars and also a few EVs and CNG-equipped hatchbacks

LAMBORGHINI URUS PERFORMANTE

The track-oriented Urus has made its way to India! The Urus Performante sheds 47kg and gets more power – 657bhp to be precise, and stickier Pirelli P ZERO Trofeo R tyres. It sits 20mm lower and is 16mm wider than the standard Lamborghini Urus. It rides on 23-inch forged lightweight alloys and also gets an Akrapovic sports exhaust system as standard. Inside there's more Alcantara upholstery and a big change includes the omission of the Sabbia, Neve and Terra terrain modes which have been replaced by a single Rally drive mode instead.

Variant	Price
Performante	₹4.22 crore

Price ex-showroom, India

JEEP GRAND CHEROKEE

The fifth-generation Jeep Grand Cherokee, which made its debut in early 2021 has finally made its way to Indian shores. It gets a four-cylinder turbo-petrol engine that makes 268bhp and 400Nm and a five seat layout for the Indian market. Not to forget Jeep's Quadra-Trac 4x4 system too, that lets it venture out into the wild outdoors. The wild outdoors.

Variant	Price
Limited O	₹77.5 lakh

Price ex-showroom, India

AUDI Q5 SPECIAL EDITION

The Q5 Special Edition is based on the Technology trim of the Q5, getting minor cosmetic updates and an accessories package. There are two bespoke paint shades on offer, District Green and Ibis White, contrasted by black elements including blacked-out ORVMs, roof rails and Audi logos. There's also a new graphite grey finish for the five-spoke wheels. Mechanically, it remains the same deploying a four-cylinder turbo-petrol engine that churns out 245bhp and 370Nm.

Variant	Price
Special Edition	₹67.05 lakh

Price ex-showroom, India

MERCEDES EQB AND GLB

Mercedes-Benz has brought in two more sport-utes to the Indian market – the GLB and EQB. The seven-seat petrol, diesel and electric SUVs are essentially the successors to the B-Class. The GLB gets the option of either a 1.4-litre turbo-petrol or a 2-litre diesel engine. Whereas the EQB, gets a 66.5kWh battery with a WLTP-claimed range of 423km and a dual-motor setup producing 225bhp and 390Nm of torque.

Variant	Price
GLB 200 Progressive Line	₹63.8 lakh
GLB 220d Progressive Line	₹66.8 lakh
GLB 220d 4MATIC AMG Line	₹69.8 lakh
EQB 300 4MATIC	₹74.50 lakh

Prices ex-showroom, India

BYD ATTO 3

BYD's second EV for the Indian market is the Atto 3, a compact SUV that features a 60.48kWh battery offering an ARAI-tested range of 521km. It gets a single PMSM motor on the front axle producing 198bhp and 310Nm of torque. The Atto 3 gets 80kW DC fast charging capability and comes with a 7kW home charger along with a 3kW portable charger as standard.

Variant	Price
Extended range	₹33.99 lakh

Price ex-showroom, India

by **MANDAR SAWANT**

PORSCHE 718 BOXSTER AND 718 CAYMAN STYLE EDITIONS

Based on the entry-level 718 Cayman and Boxster, the Style editions are for those Porschephiles who love some eye candy. The Cayman comes finished in a stealthy Arctic Grey with black accents, while the Boxster you see here gets a bright Ruby Star Neo shade with contrasting white details paying homage to the legendary Rubystone Red 964 911 RS. The contrasting colours are present on the decorative racing stripes on the bonnet, sides and 20-inch alloys. Inside, you get a leather package in black including contrast stitching in chalk, the Porsche crest on the headrests and illuminated door sill panels.

Variant	Price
718 Cayman Style edition	₹1.44 crore
718 Boxster Style edition	₹1.48 crore

Prices ex-showroom, India

VOLKSWAGEN TIGUAN EXCLUSIVE EDITION

The Tiguan Exclusive Edition brings with it a few cosmetic enhancements to the exterior and interior of the mid-size SUV. It gets 18-inch five-spoke alloys, load sill protection at the rear, 'Exclusive Edition' badging and two new colour options: Pure White and Oryx White. Mechanically it remains unchanged, retaining the creamy 2-litre TSI engine.

Variant	Price
Exclusive Edition	₹33.49 lakh

Price ex-showroom, India

TATA TIAGO NRG CNG

The Tiago NRG is the third Tata car to get a CNG variant this year. The 60-litre CNG kit is available on its XT and XZ variants. Its 1.2-litre three-cylinder engine remains identical, although it makes less power at 70bhp with 95Nm of torque in CNG mode.

Variant	Price
XT NRG	₹7.39 lakh
NRG	₹7.79 lakh

Price ex-showroom, India

TOYOTA GLANZA CNG

The Bale...erm... Glanza is the first model from Toyota to be equipped with a CNG kit from the factory. It is available on the S and G trim of the Glanza and compared to its equivalent petrol-powered versions, it costs almost a lakh more. The Glanza CNG comes only with the 5-speed manual transmission option. In petrol-only mode, its engine churns out 86bhp and 113Nm, whereas in the CNG mode, the output drops to 76bhp and 98.5Nm. Claimed fuel efficiency of the Toyota Glanza CNG with its 55-litre CNG fuel tank is 30.61km/kg and besides the CNG badging on the tailgate, it remains identical inside-out to its petrol-powered counterpart.

Variant	Price
S MT	₹8.43 lakh
G MT	₹9.46 lakh

Prices ex-showroom, India

MARUTI ALTO K10 S-CNG

The Maruti Suzuki Alto K10 received a facelift earlier this year and the hatchback now gets a CNG option too. The Alto K10 S-CNG is only available in the VXi variant and is powered by a 1-litre nat-asp engine making 55bhp of power and 82Nm of torque – which is 8bhp and 7Nm less when compared to the petrol-powered Alto K10. Maruti Suzuki claims that the K10 S-CNG can deliver a fuel economy of 33.85km/kg, with a 55-litre CNG tank. It also gets an S-CNG badge at the rear on the boot lid.

Variant	Price
VXI CNG	₹5.95 lakh

Price ex-showroom, India

7 CONTINENTS 7 ODYSSEYS ONE DOMINAR

An odyssey is no ordinary journey. It is an adventure where one has to go beyond just reaching a destination and explore the unknown. Riders have always had an insatiable hunger to push the limits of touring not defined by man-made boundaries. Dominar set out to explore the world and put its tread marks on every continent with passionate riders. Each adventure is an amazing feat of victory of man and machine to overcome whatever came their way. At the culmination of over 6,00,000 kms and navigating the most treacherous roads in the world, Dominar Odysseys have just one message to every rider – Don't Hold Back.

The perfect man-machine partnership

If you have the will then, Dominar will lead the way. This is the Dominar pact. Terrains, weather conditions, long distances or any other challenges don't matter. The Odysseys across the seven continents stand testimony to the ready-to-tour nature of this touring beast. The 40 PS power kicks in early and is delivered in a linear way. It's upright, commanding yet comfortable riding stance ensures that the rider feels no strain even after a long day on the saddle. Safety is never a compromise when one is riding the Dominar, thanks to USD forks, twin channel ABS, full LED headlamp and superior front disc braking. All these features and many more enable riders to push limits to experience the unforgettable. Traversing over 6,00,000 kms across the most difficult roads in the world, the 'Road of Bones' in Russia, ice-cold conditions of the Arctic and the Antarctic, the Death Valley Route in California are a few of the proud feats accomplished by our modern-day riders on the Dominar.

You explore the impossible when you don't hold back

The indomitable spirt of the Riders and Dominar lead to many extraordinary firsts for an Indian motorcycle.

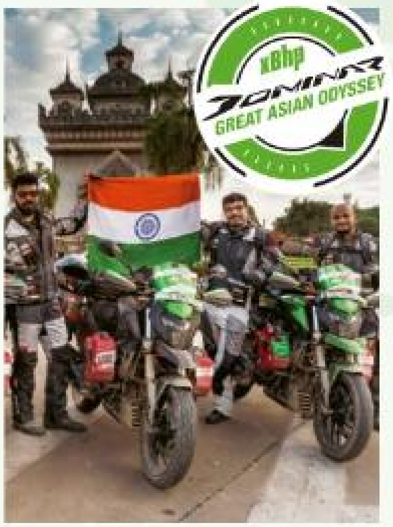
- The first Indian bike to conquer the World's Toughest Journey **– The Trans-Siberian Odyssey**
- The only Indian bike to tame the Charyn Canyon
- The first Indian bike to reach the Arctic Circle
- The first Indian bike to ride in the Antarctica
- The first all Indian Women Expedition **- ASEAN Cross Country Odyssey**

EXPLORERS DIARY

DOMINAR
ASEAN
CROSS COUNTRY EXPEDITION

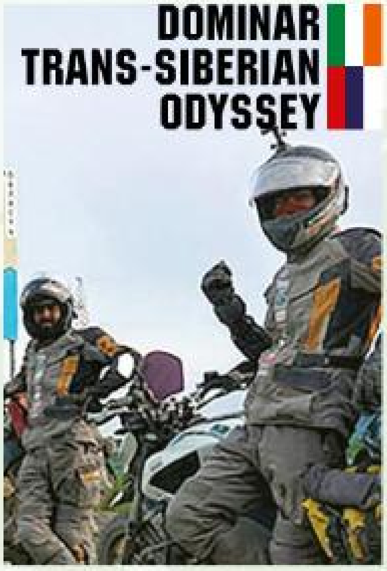
- **4 RIDERS**
- **6 COUNTRIES**
- **17600 KMS**
- **56 DAYS**

> This expedition set its own challenges. Road conditions from good roads to mud roads to no roads to roads under construction. Dominar made it possible for us to ride for over 12 hours a day.
>
> **– PIYA BAHADUR**



- **11 RIDERS**
- **11 COUNTRIES**
- **15000 KMS**
- **90 DAYS**

> It has taken so much weight, tolerated all kinds of roads and riding conditions. Hats off to Bajaj for making such a wonderful motorcycle.
>
> **– SUNDEEP GAJJAR**



DOMINAR TRANS-SIBERIAN ODYSSEY

- 3 RIDERS
- 6 COUNTRIES
- 15600 KMS
- 53 DAYS

> Riding on the 'Road of Bones' during the Trans-Siberian Odyssey, gave me the confidence to take up an even bigger challenge of riding solo across Europe and Africa on my Dominar again.
>
> **– DEEPAK KAMATH**

DOMINAR AFRO-EUROPEAN ODYSSEY

- 1 RIDER
- 34 COUNTRIES
- 35000 KMS
- 150 DAYS

> The way the Dominar moved around the curve... The build quality was solid. Even if you push it hard, it was not going to budge down.
>
> **– DEEPAK KAMATH**

DOMINAR AUSTRAL-ASIAN ODYSSEY

- SOLO RIDE
- 9 COUNTRIES
- 2 CONTINENTS
- 27500 KMS
- 6 MONTHS

> After riding for 27,500 kms for 6 months with no breakdowns, I can vouch that this bike is going to be my companion for life.
>
> **– CANDIDA LOUIS**

DOMINAR ROOF OF THE WORLD ODYSSEY

- 6 RIDERS
- 3 COUNTRIES
- 15000 KMS
- 99 DAYS

> We were at the beautiful Gurudongmar Lake at an altitude of 17,810 ft. Most bikes would struggle but Dominar made it with enough torque, enough fun and enough power to pull you through.
>
> **– SARATH SHENOY**

DOMINAR POLAR ODYSSEY

ARCTIC TO ANTARCTIC

- 15 COUNTRIES
- 3 CONTINENTS
- 51000 KMS
- 99 DAYS

> A ride of a lifetime, from the Arctic region to all the way down to the Antarctic region, riding over 51,000 kms through two continents.
>
> **– AVINASH PS**

Inspiring many more Modern-Day Explorers

This extraordinary feat across continents has encouraged many more to hit the road. The world is waiting to be rediscovered. What's stopping you? Don't Hold Back!

SCAN TO EXPERIENCE THE DOMINAR ODYSSEYS

DOMINAR

DON'T HOLD BACK

Driven

MH 14 TCF 685

by AATISH MISHRA PHOTOGRAPHY *by* ABHISHEK BENNY

Audi Q3

The much-loved Audi Q3 is back, getting a full generation upgrade along with a new platform and engine, to take on the compact luxury SUV competition

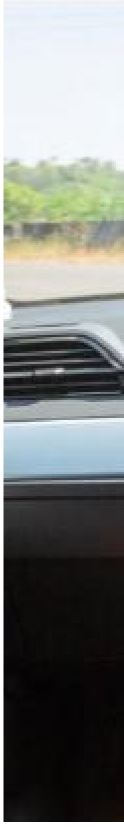
MEET THE NEW AUDI Q3. WELL, KIND-of new. You see, this is the second-generation car — which replaces the first-gen we used to have on sale in India all those years ago. But… this car was unveiled internationally in 2018. Back in the day, the Q3 was a best-seller for Audi which really makes me wonder what took it so long to bring this new-gen car here. Audi attempted to cash in on the Q2, but it never garnered the sort of interest or demand that the Q3 managed. So here we are — a new Q3 that shakes things up significantly from what we knew about it before. It's new both on the face of it and under the skin. An all-new car, in all respects. And new cars, even kind-of new ones, get me excited.

We'll get to the driving but before that let's talk styling because it's so far removed from the older Q3. It's sharper, more aggressive, more contemporary. The face is now unmistakably Audi — the typical octagonal grille, with these vertical slats on it. The lights too, with neat looking DRLs. I love the silver accents — they aren't chrome. They have a satin-y finish and break up the design nicely without being overly blingy. Mind you, the Q3 doesn't get the fancy Matrix lights but regular LED headlamps. The 18-inchers are too bland for my taste, but I do like the body coloured cladding. It continues to look sharp at the rear — sharp taillamps, fancy DRL elements in them, and more of that satin finish at the bottom. That said, it looks mean. Aggressive. Exactly what people expect of their SUVs. There's more than a hint of the Q8 in there, particularly when you look at its stance and proportions. Not a bad place to take inspiration from, eh?

The Q3 is now 96mm longer than before, and the wheelbase is up by 77mm. It is wider too, by 18mm and all of this doesn't make too much of a difference on the outside but should make it a little more spacious inside.

I settle in behind the wheel. Familiarity smacks me in the face. The steering wheel, Virtual Cockpit system, the infotainment screen — all reminiscent of other modern Audis. That's a good thing — it doesn't make the new-ish Q3 feel its age, it feels perfectly contemporary. What I really like is that it doesn't get the second touchscreen below the first for the HVAC controls, and instead gets physical dials. It was properly done as a cost-saving measure but it has real ergonomic benefits as well. It's well loaded — wireless phone charger, a panoramic sunroof and two-zone climate control. I do wish it had ventilated seats and wireless connectivity for Android Auto and Apple CarPlay though. No going back once you get used to them!

Thumb the starter and the petrol engine fires up. More familiarity — the 2-litre TFSI engine that is on so many other Audis and Group cars is what is under the hood. That much loved TDI engine that the Q3 had, well, it isn't retuning — we knew that what with Audi's petrol-only strategy for India. The TSI engine feels typical Audi though. Refined and quiet, it fits just right with the Q3's entry level luxury positioning, offering a near silent experience when you're gentle with



Back in the day, the Q3 was a best-seller for Audi which really makes me wonder what took it so long to bring this new-gen car here

Top: 7-speed DCT perfectly complements the strong motor; drive modes adjust drivetrain and steering but not suspension. **Above:** Familiar engine but suits the Q3 well. **Left:** The cabin of the Q3 is a big step up on the old one and on par with the competition

Clockwise from top: The Q3 is a very impressive handler and can hold a line well; the longer wheelbase has freed up a fair bit of room in the rear, making this more chauffeur-friendly than ever before; panoramic sunroofs have become a basic expectation at this price point

the throttle. Should you choose to hustle it though, the engine more than obliges. It is quick, punchy and brimming with character. Performance is more than adequate, and this is an engine that enjoys being pulled to its redline. The motor's note has a hint of naughtiness to it, just enough to keep you entertained on the inside without bothering anyone on the outside. Add to that a snappy 7-speed DCT transmission and quattro, and you have a drivetrain that remains energetic, urging you to get a move on.

The ride quality was another impressive bit. Based on the MQB platform now, it draws a lot of its character from the bigger SUVs in Audi's range. The Q7, the Q5 — they remain the benchmark in their segments when it comes to ride quality and the Q3 follows in that vein. It rides beautifully over our roads, soaking up nearly everything that comes its way. There's a certain sophistication that has been inculcated into the Q3's ride that wasn't there before, and that is precisely what makes it feel so grown up. However, in the same breath I must mention that the Q3 gets steel springs and non-dynamic dampers, which is par for the course. They offer no adjustability like air-suspension or dynamic dampers would, and that means certain bumps are felt in the cabin, but it is never uncomfortable.

If it wasn't for how high I was sitting, I would have thought I was in a quick hatchback

What I really didn't expect was for the handling to blow me away. A tall car, primarily FWD, no trick dampers to tighten things up — should be boring right? Not if Audi has anything to say about it! The Q3 genuinely blew me away with how well it went around corners. The steering felt crisp, dialled-in and communicative. The turn in was sharp. The Q3 felt eager, like a playful puppy, when being chucked around — constantly asking for more and more from the driver. You can really commit to corners in this. With competent Michelin rubber on it, grip around bends was much better than I anticipated and the car makes it easy to guide it through corners the way you'd like to. Understeer sets in quite late. If it wasn't for how high I was sitting, I would have thought I was in a quick hatchback and not a crossover with the way it was behaving around bends. And unlike its rivals, the Q3 gets AWD as standard — powering out of corners is drama free. In Dynamic mode, the steering gets heavier and the drivetrain sharper, leaving you with a compact SUV that can really, truly hustle.

What about the rear seat, though? Can the Q3 live up to its luxury car intentions? Well, for starters space is generous — there's more than adequate knee room and headroom. The wheelbase has grown compared to the previous Q3 and this makes the rear seat more comfortable. Interestingly, the rear bench of the Q3 slides on rails — 150mm back and forth — and this allows you to make more room in the boot should you need it. The Q3 is marginally wider than before but it is best left for two people in the back, since there is a transmission tunnel for the AWD system that eats into foot space. This is a backseat that isn't particularly lavish but it is spacious enough to be chauffeured around in without complaints.

Overall, the Q3 is a very impressive package. It does so much right — looks good, feels expensive, is comfortable and yet engaging to drive all at the same time. It genuinely feels like a proper all-rounder, with very little to criticise. Then you look at the price tag — ₹50.4 lakh (ex-showroom) for this fully kitted out Technology trim. That is expensive, ₹1.5 lakh more so than the diesel / AWD Mercedes-Benz GLA even, and ₹5 lakh more than the fully kitted out XC40 and BMW X1. The Q3 then, isn't value for money. But what it manages to do is bring you the experience of much bigger SUVs in the range, at a much more affordable price point. That is not something you can say about its rivals. ■

Right: Physical AC controls are a joy to use, especially compared to the touchscreen controls on higher-end Audis

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo-petrol **Power** 187bhp @ 4200-6000rpm **Torque** 320Nm @ 1500-4100rpm **0-100kmph** 7.3 seconds (claimed) **Top speed** NA **Price** ₹50.4 lakh (ex-showroom)

+ Handling, ride, space

– Price

evo rating ★★★★☆

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MH 14 TCF 685
Q3
40 TFSI

by ANAND MOHAN PHOTOGRAPHY *by* ROHIT G MANE

Mercedes-Benz GLB & EQB

A third row of seats might be the USP of the electric EQB and its ICE sibling, the GLB, but there's a lot more going for the two

MH14TCL473

WHILE THE GLB AND THE EQB ARE the spiritual successors of the B-Class, there's not even a hint of MPV in them. The world wants SUVs, the boxier the better. And that's why you get, for the first time in this segment, two seven-seat SUVs that plug the gap left by the sold-out GLC. Until the next generation of the GLC comes to Indian shores, Mercedes aims to test the waters for a mid-range seven-seater and also to find out if that extra row in an EV makes it more desirable.

Parked next to each other, while the scale of the two are the same, you will not be able to tell that they have the same platform underneath. They share the MFA platform with the GLA, the smallest SUV in the Mercedes portfolio, but the GLB and EQB are a full size larger. The GLB looks very cool with its straight lines, high bonnet and tall shoulders. The rear looks like a shrunken GLS, which will appeal to many. It's marginally narrower than the GLC but longer and taller so cabin space can be maximised to fit an extra

For the first time on a media drive, we got the opportunity to drive a diesel and electric variant back-to-back

row of seats. Overall, despite the GLB's compact dimensions, it's got good space on the inside, which is a packaging win for Mercedes. That said, even Mercedes is quite upfront about the fact that the third row is only suitable for pre-teens and pets. Best is to leave the third row folded flat, enjoy the big boot, and use it as a versatile five-seater.

The EQB though, is a slightly different story. It doesn't get its own EV architecture like the EQS so there are a few compromises in fitting the battery in the floor. Thus, the seats are set higher, eating both into ground clearance and kneeroom in the cabin. It has exactly the same shut lines as the GLB but the swooping headlights and connected taillamps soften the whole macho stance. You might even think that it borders on an estate body style. The EQB rides on smaller and more aero-friendly 18-inch wheels compared to the larger 19 AMG five-spoke alloys on the GLB 220d 4MATIC, giving the latter a sportier stance. The grille and a few EQB badges aside, these SUVs are the same, despite looking so different.

Both sport a smart and familiar interior design with the large rectangular screen on the dashboard split into two 10.25-inch screens for the centre console and instrument cluster. You get all the different digital dials to swap displays the way you like, with the EQB showing EV-specific dials and the GLB showing the tachometer. The EQB gets rose gold inserts for the air vents and the seat upholstery gets a similar shade, 'man-made leather', and fabric made of sustainable materials, but the steering wheel is wrapped in Nappa leather, which is a bit of a mismatch. The GLB gets lovely micro-fibre black upholstery that feels very premium.

The front seats are electrically adjustable and very comfortable but the real party trick is the flexibility of the cabin. The middle row can slide by up to 140mm which can make plenty of space in the third row on the days you want to stuff your kids in there. When used as a five-seater, the seat also reclines by 25 degrees for added comfort. The floor is a bit high in the EQB due to the battery so you will sit a little knees-up. The third row, as I have mentioned above, isn't for adults. With the third row up, you get a non-existent boot — 110 litres in the EQB and 130 litres in the GLB. Fold the third row and that frees up 465 litres in the EQB and 500 litres in the GLB. Even the middle row folds flat, giving you over 1000 litres of boot space. You get over 1600 litres if you count to the roof, but then again, this isn't a Tata Ace, so don't go register on Porter.

Left and above: Both GLB and EQB offer a commanding driving position with a view of the creases on the bonnet; taillamps remind of the GLS

For the first time on a media drive, we got the opportunity to drive a diesel and electric variant back-to-back. Let's start with the GLB. You get two engine options, a 1.4-litre turbo-petrol in the GLB 200 that makes 161bhp and 250Nm, gets cylinder deactivation and powers the front wheels via a 7-speed DSG. We didn't get to sample this on the drive. The GLB also gets a 2-litre diesel powering either the front wheels or all four in the top-spec version GLB 220d 4MATIC. That's what we drove. It makes 188bhp and 400Nm and can do the 0-100kmph sprint in 7.6 seconds, so it's no slouch. The engine sounds a bit gruff at low revs but as you pick up speed, the car sounds sportier. The diesel gets the 8-speed DSG that works so well, and when you drive in Sport mode, you wouldn't want to

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As much fun as the GLB is to drive, the EQB is better

keep it in any other setting. The shifts are always on time and on a winding road the SUV always feels like it's in the right gear; it just works so well with that 2-litre motor. Since the GLB isn't a very wide car, you can hustle it in the twisties, but we'll come to the handling in a bit. Let's hop into the EQB first.

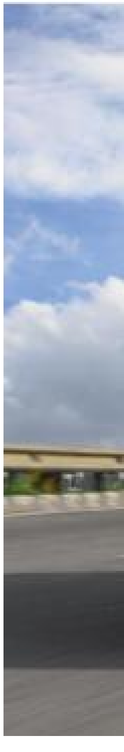
Because as much fun as the GLB is to drive, the EQB is better. On paper, the sprint times are slower — with 225bhp the 0-100kmph sprint takes 8 seconds in the EQB 300, but you have 390Nm of torque on tap all the time in the EQB and that really works in its favour every time you step on it. The 66.5kWh battery isn't the largest so power delivery is conservative on the 300, ensuring you get the best of the 423km claimed WLTP range. Nevertheless, there's ample performance to make you want to like this car. There's a creamy smoothness to the way the EQB goes about its business. You get to the destination fresher than when you started the drive. EVs are very relaxing, and on a winding road, driving downhill, there is no range anxiety either. You only add range so long as the battery is big enough to take you to the top of the hill, you theoretically won't run out of charge on the way back, because regen adds to the EQB's range rapidly.

Since both these SUVs are CBUs (the GLB comes from Mexico and the EQB from Hungary), the higher capacity EQB 350 wasn't brought to India as it wouldn't be priced competitively. The EQB comes with 400V architecture, with a lithium-ion battery pack under the floor packed in five modules comprising 300 cells. A 100kW DC charger will charge from 10-80 per cent in just 32 minutes. Mercedes is setting up its own 140-plus charging network at its dealer network across the country that you can benefit from.

The ride is surprisingly good. You get steel springs, not air-suspension, and the SUVs aren't re-tuned for Indian roads, but low speed ride is good, and even when cornered hard, the SUVs feel surefooted. All-wheel-drive helps put all the power down well, and the seat cushioning holds you well to enable continued spirited driving down a winding road. Both the SUVs feel light on their feet, especially the GLB. The EQB carries a 469kg battery which makes it weigh a fair bit more but the centre of gravity is low so that helps in agility. Ground clearance at 155mm in the EQB isn't what you'd expect in an SUV, but it's better than the 142mm you get in an EQC. The two ridges on the bonnet allow for a commanding driving position, so while I like to set the seat low, in the EQB and GLB, to keep the ridge lines in sight, I set the seat a little higher.

Since both are CBUs, they are priced at a premium. The GLB 200 is priced at ₹63.8 lakh, ex-showroom, the GLB 220d costs ₹66.8 lakh while the 4MATIC AMG line variant you see in these pictures is priced at ₹69.8 lakh. The EQB is priced even steeper at ₹74.5 lakh. While the EV sits in its own space and will be the more

Clockwise from top left: Rose gold vents in the EQB signify it's an EV as does the badge on the fender; from the rear three-quarter, looks more estate-like



interesting choice for many, the GLB won't find the going so easy. I'd assume only a small pool of buyers who use seven seats frequently enough would find the GLB to be a practical buy at this price; it's hard to believe that a third row in this segment is going to be very sought after. If it is, would you pick a petrol or a diesel sticking to the traditional fossil fuels, or welcome the future with electric motoring? At just a ₹5 lakh premium over the ICE, I suspect it might be the latter. ☒

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1950cc, turbo-diesel / Electric dual-motor **Power** 188bhp @ 3800rpm / 225bhp **Torque** 400Nm @ 1600-2600rpm / 390Nm **0-100kmph** 7.6 / 8 sec **Top speed** 217 / 160kmph **Price** ₹69.8 lakh / ₹74.5 lakh (ex-showroom)

🟩 Dynamics, ride, versatility

🟥 Price, range (EQB)

evo rating ★★★★☆

by **AATISH MISHRA** **PHOTOGRAPHY** *by* **BMW**

BMW X7

BMW's flagship SUV goes under the knife and comes out even more in-your-face

I TRY NOT TO START TESTS BY TALKING about styling, but there's no avoiding that here, is there? If you thought the previous X7 was over the top, the facelift flips the very definition of what top is on its head. Can I let you in on a little secret, though? Promise me you won't stop reading because of what I say next. I like it. I think it works. That face? It's bold, brash, and a direction we never thought we'd see BMW go in. But I like it. I think it is much more proportionate than the previous one, where the grille dominated things and the headlamps looked like an afterthought. It's a face that is now shared with all of BMW's flagships — the X7 on the SUV front, the 7 Series on the car front, the i7 on the EV front and the XM on, well, the M Division front. Of all these cars, I think the X7 pulls this face off the best, looking objectively good on most days. That's just my opinion, though. You might not like the split headlamp design. You might not like the oversized grille. You might not even like how the rear has evolved ever so slightly. The thing about car design is, to each their own!

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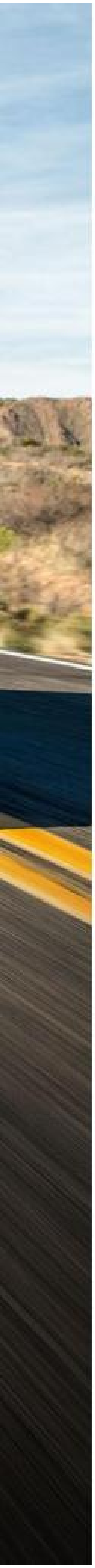
Right: Massive 23-inch wheels on our test car, though the X7 will come with 21s as standard

There are fairly significant updates to the interiors too, much more than what is considered acceptable for a mere facelift. The entire dash has been given a revamp, with twin curved screens dominating your view. There's a 12.3-inch instrument cluster, along with a 14.9-inch infotainment screen both running the latest iDrive system. You'd be familiar with it if you've been in the iX — the first EV BMW brought here. That small change immediately lifts up the X7's cabin and makes it seem more modern. The rest of the dash and centre console has been rearranged — the air-con controls are narrower, the gear stick has made way for a stubby selector, and there are backlit elements in the dashboard.

The second row remains ridiculously comfortable with captain seats, though there is the option to get a bench as well. The third row remains cramped for adults but interestingly, you do get a separate sunroof just for the third row, in addition to the ginormous panoramic sunroof. Neat touch, and something we Indians would go crazy about. Boot space with all three rows up is limited — 326 litres — but it will expand to 750 litres with the last row folded.

The X7 gets updated engines for 2022, and we found ourselves behind the wheel of the 40i that features the straight-six turbo-petrol that puts out a cool 375bhp and 520Nm of torque — outputs that are more than generous to hustle the X7 along. While the engine might look similar on paper, there are actually significant changes inside. First, this engine is now a mild hybrid, and it can be driven at low speeds in full-EV mode. This is thanks to a switchable cam follower on the exhaust side. It also has an electric valvetrain on the intake side, and has switched to the Miller combustion cycle, which is more efficient and less polluting. The mild hybrid system adds 12bhp and 200Nm of torque under hard acceleration when the battery charge allows it, bumping up performance marginally.

The upper limits of its dynamic capability were hard to come close to on the road



Top: Dash has been revised with the curved screen. **Above, right:** Stubby selector makes way for the traditional gear selector

Delivery from the engine is creamy smooth and refined, befitting of a luxury car. But poke it, and it is pretty sharp. 0-100kmph comes up in 5.8 seconds, which is brisk for a 2-point-something tonne SUV. It picks up pace with intent, you can hear the six-cylinder growling in the distance as it does so. This is generous performance for an SUV like the X7 — the only time you're really going to be calling on that sort of acceleration is when pushing for quick overtakes on the highway, for which it will willingly oblige. The rest of the time, you've got a smooth, quiet cruiser with plenty of performance in reserve.

The chassis has been further honed on the X7 — it was already best-in-class when it comes to dynamic ability and it just got a little better. The steering system has been revised and so has the damping to make the body movement more controlled. We were driving the car with the full-fat 23s and sticky Pirelli P Zero rubber so the upper limits of its dynamic capability were hard to come close to on public roads. But the beauty of the X7 is that it feels incredibly connected at whatever speeds you choose to drive it. Turn in is quick, there's roll but it is well controlled and this comes together to give the feeling that the X7 is very eager to go harder around bends. It is unlikely we'll get the 23s in India, more likely the 'base' 21s, but that should still keep the X7 in a league of its own in terms of dynamic ability. The X7 is king-sized but its dynamic abilities beg to differ.

The USA's unblemished roads were impossible to give us a clear idea of the ride quality of the X7, so that's best judged when we get the car to drive back home. That said, the vertical movement has been controlled to a large degree on the highways. You do feel a bit of it but it is never unnerving.

Overall, the X7 has taken a step up — the styling has gotten more in-your-face, the interiors have been made much more contemporary and there are small tweaks to the engine and chassis. Nothing massive, but these are significant changes for a mere mid-life refresh. With them, the X7 becomes even more relevant at the top of the luxury market, where it takes on the Mercedes-Benz GLS and the Audi Q8. As for prices, the older X7 40i sat at ₹1.18 crore ex-showroom. Prices for the facelift in India should have been announced before the year ends, with the ritual price hike all manufacturers effect for the start of the new year. The X7's strength's lie in the fact that it retain's BMW's driver's car traits with incredible dynamic ability, while being a bona fide luxury car at the same time. It's a good mix, that not everyone can nail.

Engine In-line 6-cyl, 2998cc, turbo-petrol
Power 375bhp @ 5200-6250rpm **Torque** 520Nm @ 1850-5000rpm (+200Nm with mild hybrid)
0-100kmph 5.8sec (claimed) **Top speed** 250kmph
Price ₹1.4 crore (estimated, ex-showroom)

+ Performance, dynamics
− Polarising styling

evo rating ★★★★☆

by ANAND MOHAN PHOTOGRAPHY by ROHIT G MANE

BYD Atto 3

BYD is the modern template of an electric car company and the funky Atto 3 capitalises well on the company's strengths

TN614TC035/1

BYD STANDS FOR BUILD YOUR Dreams. Not many might have seen or heard of this brand, except while following an electric municipal transport bus but in the electric future this could arguably be one of the most prominent companies. And the first taste of what is in store for us, private car owners and buyers, is the Atto 3. Okay there's also the E6 MPV that was first only available for fleets, but this Atto 3, it really is very interesting. Backed by BYD's enviable EV ecosystem and the Blade battery, touted as the safest battery in the world right now, the Atto 3 packs a solid punch in the EV-space. In fact, after the E6 and the initial response to the Atto 3, BYD has set an ambitious goal to gain 30 per cent of the EV market share in India by 2030. So before we get to the car, it's imperative to know a bit about the brand.

A brief history

Wang Chuanfu, a chemistry professor in a Chinese university specialised in batteries in the early nineties. China's tech revolution was underway and by 1995 he was confident that batteries would play a key role in the future. He found investors to back him and he founded BYD, and ever since, building the battery and a robust ecosystem around it has been the key focus for the company. In 2003, Wang saw an opportunity to expand the battery business in the automobile sector. He bought a small car company called Qinchuan Automobile. Incidentally, Qinchuan back then used to manufacture the Alto (the Maruti 800 in India) under licence from Suzuki and soon after the agreement expired, couldn't sustain itself. BYD bought the company and started reverse engineering cars like so many Chinese carmakers did in the last two decades — think Corolla rip-offs. The reverse engineering gave BYD deep pockets very quickly and towards the

Left: Screen swivels from portrait to landscape mode. **Below:** Atto 3 has a 2720mm wheelbase translating to ample interior space

end of the decade, the company had already transitioned to making fully electric cars.

China went through a phase of subsidies to encourage carmakers to make hybrids and electric cars just like our FAME subsidies have made Indian brands push towards EVs. This further helped BYD grow, gave it the funds to build a solid ecosystem that would support its future plans including buying lithium mines around the world — BYD claims that it owns between 10-12 per cent of global lithium reserves. Things fell into place with the success of the blade battery. It successfully passed the nail penetration test — a test to trigger thermal runaways and BYD even rolled a 46-tonne truck over the battery, put it back in the car and it still worked. That's why Toyota will be using blade batteries in their new EVs very soon and even Tesla is rumoured to have signed an agreement for blade batteries in the new Model Y.

BYD claims that it owns between 10-12 per cent of global lithium reserves

Above: Performance is more than adequate for intercity runs. **Below:** 18-inch wheels have a smart aerodynamic alloy wheel design

The Atto 3

Sorted technology aside, the design of the Atto 3 will make you curious. The Atto 3 sports a 'Dragon Face 3.0 family' design language. If that isn't Chinese enough for you, the interior design is called 'rhythmic interior'. That said, the Atto 3 does look smart in the metal if a bit busy. It's a bigger car than the MG ZS EV with 140mm more in the wheelbase and larger 18-inch wheels. Cabin space optimisation is impressive and on the outside, the light detailing, alloy wheel design, sporty bumper, all the cuts and creases, they all make the Atto 3 feel considerably premium in comparison, justifying the higher price. At ₹33.9 lakh, ex-showroom, it comes at a premium, but the money seems well spent. BYD has already received 1,500 bookings for the Atto 3, their Chennai plant is capable of annually assembling 15,000 units of the Atto 3 and E6 combined, so sales are off to a promising start.

BLADE BATTERY

ON THE FACE OF IT, AN LFP BATTERY isn't revolutionary. The chemistry has existed for a long time and compared to Lithium-Ion batteries, LFPs offer less energy density. However, the chemistry is more stable and something a carmaker like BYD could build on with their own ecosystem supporting it from what is a 'farm to table' approach in the battery world. The lithium is sourced from their own mines, the design, engineering and manufacturing is also done in-house, so the pack itself is highly optimised. Focus could go into improving safety of the pack from the ground up, and that showed in acing the nail penetration test, the toughest test for batteries that aims to trigger thermal runaways. The battery was even subjected to the load of a 46-tonne truck over it, and it came out unfazed. The battery was fitted back in the car and it worked like nothing had happened. So the Blade battery won't give you the best range out there, but it will be efficient, much closer to manufacturer-stated range, and will work well across wide operating temperatures (-30 to +60 degree Celsius). Safety is the Blade's USP, which is why Toyota, a very conservative carmaker, has chosen to use these batteries in their new EVs. Tesla too is rumoured to soon use it in the Model Y and there are a few more such alliances in the pipeline.

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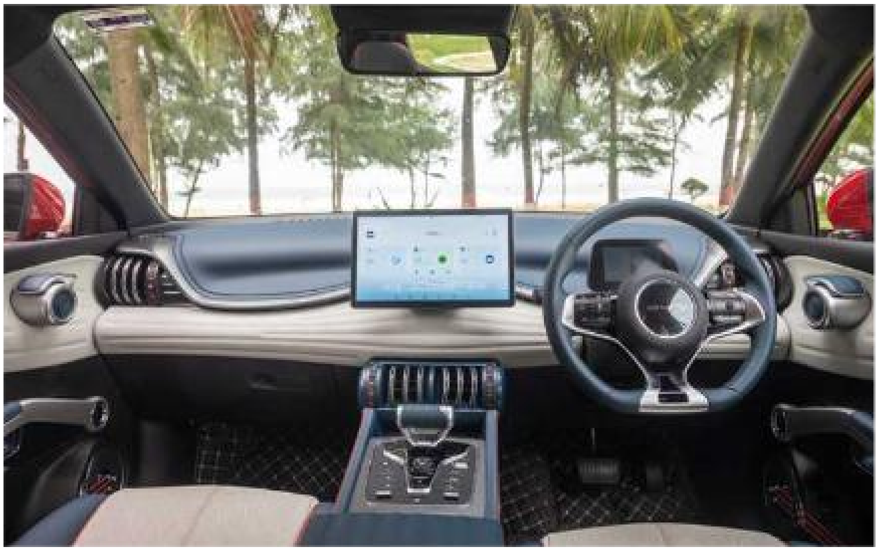

Clockwise from above: Interior is straight out of a concept car; stance is impressive; NFC touch entry is a handy feature; 8-in-1 EV powertrain

Step in and the car gets funkier! The design is nothing like you have seen before on a production car. The dashboard is dominated by what looked like a shredded muscle man, extending all the way from door to door. It takes a little getting used to but it also signifies the bold approach on the inside. The 12.8-inch central infotainment screen can swivel from landscape to portrait mode at the touch of a button, there's a beautiful airline-style gear selector, you get a wide centre console, and a deep cubby hole under the armrest. The doors have an interesting opening mechanism with the door handle neatly integrated over a tweeter. The driver's digital screen though is a bit too small and takes a lot of effort to read. You get everything from wireless charging to a panoramic sunroof, even an NFC key card to enter the car with a tap on the wing mirror that can be stored in your wallet. You won't ever need the car's key! There's also a 360-degree camera, a dash cam that can be used for photos and videos, and an SD card slot to store all this data. The hardware for the main screen is made by BYD, and even the OS is theirs, which shows in how smooth it is to use. We did miss Android Auto/Apple CarPlay at the media drive but BYD says it will be ready by the time deliveries start in January. The best feature on the inside are the front seats that are well bolstered and offer superb lumbar support; it really makes the Atto 3 stand out.

The softer setup of the Atto 3 leads to roll in corners when pushed hard

On the go

A single PMSM (Permanent Magnet Synchronous Motor) powers the front

wheels and makes 201bhp and 310Nm. It's fairly quick with a 0-100kmph sprint done and dusted in 7.3 seconds, similar to the Mahindra XUV400 that will begin deliveries soon. But with the Atto 3, the acceleration feels unhurried. The 18-inch wheels on 215-section tyres get you going without drama and multiple such runs didn't seem to drain the battery at an alarming pace. The Blade battery in the Atto 3 has a 60.5kWh capacity, and BYD claims that it runs up to 89 per cent efficiency and over large operating temperature ranges of -30 to +60 degrees Celsius. During the drive, we were impressed by the accuracy of the range, sticking very close to the number of kilometres driven. You get three modes — Eco, Normal and Sport. There is very little difference between the three except for the force required to be applied on the throttle pedal. The ride quality is good at low and medium speeds, feeling a little soft at higher speeds, but the energy retardation and brakes do a good job of slowing down the car. The softer setup leads to roll in corners when pushed hard and the torque clawing at the front wheels will make you understeer if you aren't prudent with your throttle inputs.

Should you buy one?

BYD isn't just another Chinese EV brand. They are deeply invested in the EV space and have built such a robust ecosystem, that it has helped with packaging the cars well. The Atto 3 is kitted to the gills with features, packs more than adequate performance and the Blade battery promises reliability and safety that comes from a lot of experience in making EV powertrains. Top that up with the funky interiors and a spacious cabin and you can't find much fault with the car if you don't plan to drive the socks off it on a winding road. It can also take DC fast charging up to 80kW all the time and has a battery life of over 5 lakh kilometres. I wouldn't be surprised if whatever they can assemble flies off showrooms floors double quick. ☒

Engine 60.5kWh battery pack, single motor, front-wheel-drive **Power** 201bhp **Torque** 310Nm **0-100kmph** 7.3sec (claimed) **Top speed** NA **Range** 521km (MIDC) **Price** ₹33.9 lakh (ex-showroom)

+ Interior design, features, battery technology

− Price

evo rating ★★★★½

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BUILD YOUR DREAMS
EV
ATTO 3
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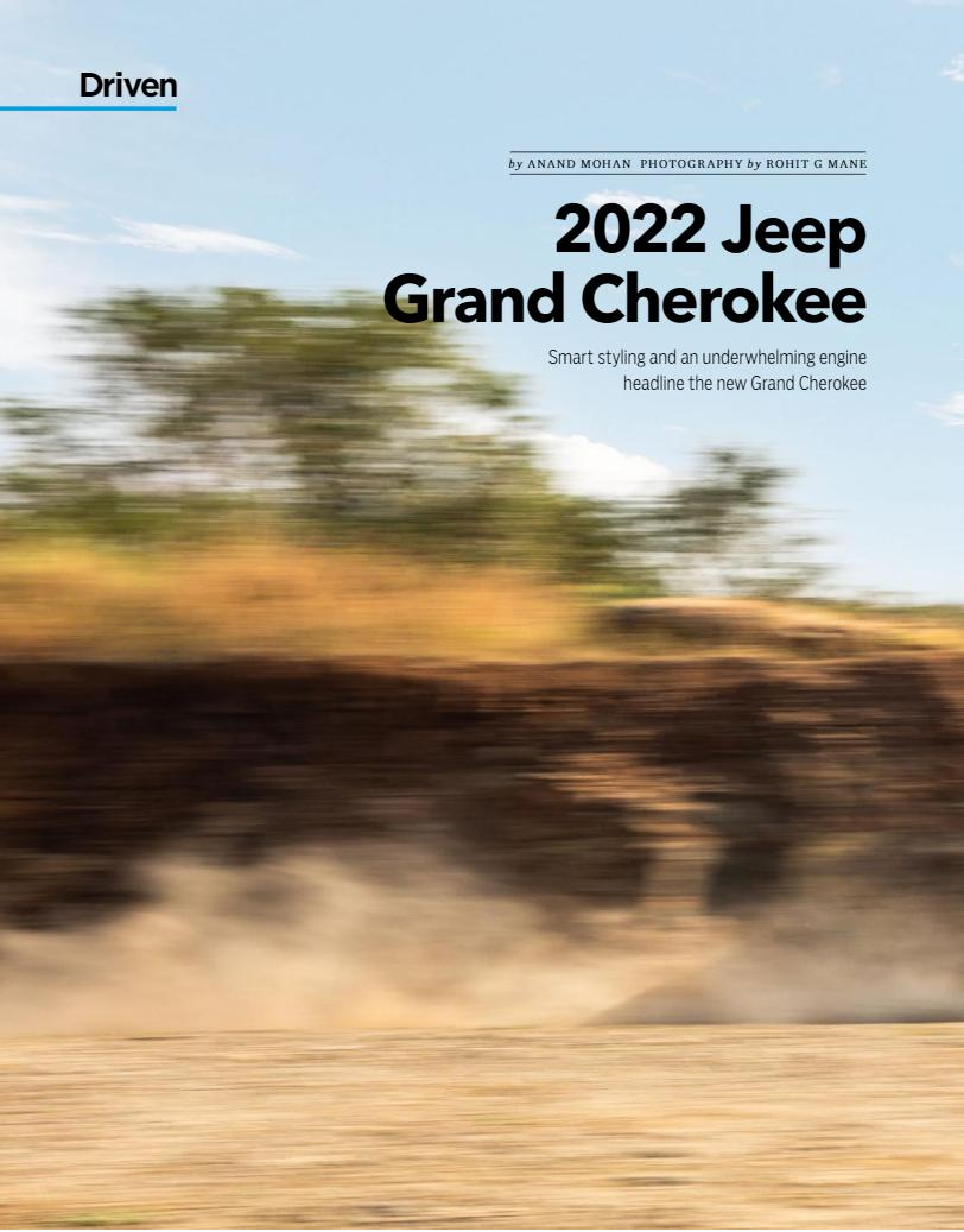
by ANAND MOHAN PHOTOGRAPHY by ROHIT G MANE

2022 Jeep Grand Cherokee

Smart styling and an underwhelming engine headline the new Grand Cherokee



EARLY WINTER MORNINGS ARE beautiful in Pune and I was looking forward to driving the Grand Cherokee. I've got fond memories of its predecessor, particularly since I only drove the SRT, and I was headed back to familiar roads, our favourite set of bends that head to the now practically defunct lake city of Lavasa. And through the course of the day, the plan was to explore some trails and do Jeep things as well. Fun, right? Too bad the 4x4 came with a babysitter to ensure we don't climb rocks in a Jeep. In a Jeep! While that was hard to resist, I wanted to know more about this all-American SUV nevertheless. Could this American tempt you away from the default Germans?

The Grand Cherokee makes an excellent first impression. I find it hard to find fault in the way this SUV looks. If you close your eyes and imagine a traditional luxury SUV — the clean straight lines, the solid shoulders, the dominating stance and road presence no other SUV can match — the Grand Cherokee ticks all the boxes. From the iconic seven-slat grille to the squared wheel arches, the minimalist design of the headlights and taillamps, the SUV looks smart, every way you look at it. The 20-inch five-spoke alloys are nice and chunky and add to the brutish character of the GC. It's a design that will age well, look contemporary several years from now, and that's half the battle won in drawing the HNIs to Jeep showrooms. You want

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As impressive as the design is, on the move, or even on paper, the GC's powertrain leaves much to be desired

to be seen in the cars you drive, specially in this segment, and in that department, the Grand Cherokee aces it.

As impressive as the design is, on the move, or even on paper, the GC's powertrain leaves much to be desired. Under the hood is a 2-litre petrol motor with a twin-scroll turbocharger helping the tiny 4-cylinder eke out 400Nm and 268bhp. Most of this is in the strong midrange of the GC so you don't get much spring in its stride until you get the engine on the boil. Once there, the SUV will happily motor along, but go harder on the gas and the small capacity shows its limitations in hauling this 2.1-tonne SUV. Higher up the rev range, the GC chugs fuel at alarming rates to keep you interested. While we didn't do a fuel run in the limited time we got with it, the on board computer indicated 4.3kmpl, which sent my brain into calculation mode. A full tank is 87 litres, and with reserve, close to 95 litres. That is a ₹10k tank-up taking you between 400-500km. Without a V8 rumble, there is no joy in burning so much dino-juice. Then there's the 8-speed auto 'box that just makes this powertrain something you would find hard to get excited about. The problem isn't so much the shifts, it's the number of times you need to change gears to keep the momentum going. With the option of a V6 / V8 / hybrid back in the USA compared to this 4-cylinder, did Jeep miss a trick by offering the weakest unit out there? I think so. Just refinement and a smooth cruising character can't win hearts unfortunately.

The USP of the Grand Cherokee is its off-road credentials though. Lack of spare tyres means Jeep wanted us to stay away from trails so we won't be able to tell you how it fares off the road (though I suspect it will be brilliant). However, this SUV sold in India isn't the trail-rated version so rock mode is given a skip in the Quadra-Trac 4x4 system. That said, on a dirt road, the Jeep runs like a Jeep, without much care of the undulations, flattening out the trail very well. The steel springs on the India-spec car are a better choice over air-suspension. The latter would wow you at slow city speeds, but the former is a sturdier set up that won't break the bank on the maintenance front. It is set up on the softer side, so low and medium speed ride is excellent. The flipside of that soft ride is that the SUV rolls and understeers if pushed too hard in corners. On the handling front, the

Left to right: The Grand Cherokee isn't a winding road hero; chunky five-spoke alloys give the GC a smashing stance; traditional SUV styling works so well on the SUV, it will age well for sure

The thing is, the GC doesn't aim to disguise itself as a fun car on a tight road

P
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km/h
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536 km

SAND/MUD
SNOW
AUTO
SPORT
P R N D

Search
Connect an Android A...
Recents, OPPO F21 Pro
Home
Media
Comfort
Nav
Phone
Vehicle
Apps

new GC is a marked step up compared to its predecessor for sure. If you want an SUV that likes a winding road though, you have several other choices in this segment.

The thing is, the Grand Cherokee doesn't aim to disguise itself as a fun car on a tight road. It is a laid-back SUV in and out. Think of the long highways you can motor on all day, keeping the engine at low revs in a high gear. Here's where the GC would feel at home, and return respectable fuel economy too.

Step in and the familiarity on the design front continues on the inside. It's one of those SUVs where you would get in and drive like you have owned the car for ages. Every feature is easy to use, you get a lovely commanding driving position with the tip of the hood in your line of sight. The front seats are comfortable and supportive for munching miles all day, there's leather everywhere, the wood finish on the dashboard and doors makes the GC look and feel premium, but it still isn't the rich cabin experience of some of the German rivals in this segment. The front seats are 8-way adjustable and the driver's seat has a memory function as well. These are ventilated and cooled and even the steering gets a heating function. Even the rear seats get a heating function, which is a first but also an overkill. Heated seats in SUVs in India is a good feature in a select few places up in the north while most owners will be from select Tier I cities so Jeep India could have specced the car better considering it's a CKD, not a CBU.

Entertainment is taken care of if you are in the front. The passenger gets a 10.25-inch screen to watch movies and more, and it doesn't distract the driver. A similarly-sized digital instrument cluster carries forward the neat design of the exterior to the interior. The screen on the centre console is intuitive to use as are the music functions behind the steering wheel. The tiny paddle shifters are a bit disappointing, and if you put in too much lock, you will not be able to reach out to shift up or down a gear, and even if you do, they won't work until you dial out the lock. The rear seat is where most owners will spend a lot of time and the issue here is that the floor is quite high. The seat is comfortable but over longer periods, a lower floor is essential for a relaxed drive. You can however recline the back seats and there is enough legroom and headroom, sun blinds too, so if you don't mind a little knees-up seating position, the rear seat will work for you.

The Grand Cherokee is packed with tech that you would expect of a flagship SUV. You get ADAS, front collision warning with active braking, lane assist, blind spot monitoring, a 360º camera that can be hugely beneficial when you are offroading, a camera for the IRVM and eight airbags.

It hurts to say that if only good design could settle things, I'd pick the Grand Cherokee. The GC will look contemporary many years from now but a Jeep has always been known for its capability to conquer tough terrain, and in the GC, one could do that in absolute comfort. However, the powertrain robs this flagship SUV of some character it so desperately deserves. It delivers only from a luxury chauffeur-driven SUV's point of view, or if you limit it to long distance highway mile-munching. There is of course the offroading aspect if you are adventurous enough and have the right set of tyres. It feels like an opportunity lost to re-establish a storied brand in the luxury space.

Clockwise from top: Commanding driving position; low redline of approx 5750rpm; centre screen is user friendly; Quadra-Trac 4x4 system with drive modes; high floor means a knees-up position

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1955cc, turbo-petrol
Power 268bhp @ 5200rpm **Torque** 400Nm @ 3000rpm **0-100kmph** NA **Top speed** NA
Price ₹77.5 lakh (ex-showroom)
➕ Design, price, offroad chops
➖ Performance, handling
evo rating ★★★⯪☆

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by RICHARD MEADEN PHOTOGRAPHY *by* PORSCHE AG

Porsche 718 Cayman GT4 ePerformance

1073bhp EV concept points the way to a future one make race series, but does it deliver the on-track thrills of Porsche Motorsport's petrol-powered products?

SILENCE. NOT SOMETHING YOU expect when you've just fired-up Porsche Motorsport's hottest new development prototype. But then there's never been a Porsche Motorsport product quite like the 718 GT4 ePerformance.

This full-EV machine — which packs a 1073bhp punch and can lap most racetracks faster than a 992 Cup car — is billed as the future of Porsche's one-make motorsport business. This makes the GT4 ePerformance a 'Big Deal', both for marking the moment Porsche took another emotive step away from internal combustion, and for the company accepting that its motorsport customers (of which there are thousands) will expect and want to go racing in EV machines.

Porsche had two starting points for this project. The first is the 718 Cayman GT4 Cup, which Porsche Motorsport build alongside its 911 Cup, GT3 R and RSR racers. This was then adapted to accept an evolved EV powertrain from the Mission R concept.

Porsche also plundered its racing parts bin, fitting 911 RSR suspension, then wrapping it in a bespoke wide-track body made by Porsche Style. With huge wings and an even huger rear diffuser it looks every inch the ruthless race car.

So much of Porsche's recent racing activity has informed the development of this car. From the e-motor technology employed in the 919 Hybrid to the hugely sophisticated control systems that are the real hotbed of innovation in Formula E. Look back further and the 918 Spyder and 911 GT3 R Hybrid have all played their part. It's reassuring to learn that when you're at the vanguard, motorsport remains the ultimate proving ground for fast-tracking ideas and getting things to work.

We're all having to recalibrate what constitutes impressive power outputs in an EV world, but with well over 1000bhp the ePerformance leaves you in no doubt it's a major-league machine. With two electric motors — one in the nose, approximately where the petrol tank would have sat in the regular GT4, the other where the GT4's flat-six would have been — it's something of a stopgap platform in terms of packaging, but the principle of a robust, serviceable and cost-effective EV racing car is clear to see, with the same gearbox, electric motors and pulse-controlled inverters on the front and rear axles offering smart modularity.

EVs always pay a weight penalty versus ICE, but at 1500kg the 1073bhp, all-wheel drive, widebody ePerformance isn't excessively heavy, especially if you consider the latest rear-drive, narrow-body 500bhp petrol-engined GT4 RS Clubsport weighs 1330kg. Whichever way you slice it, the ePerformance is a whole new level of Porsche GT car.

Before we're let loose driving solo we're treated to a passenger ride alongside Timo Bernhard. As one of Porsche's main development drivers on the ePerformance programme he knows the car better than anyone. Unsurprisingly, he's in the groove from the moment we leave the pitlane, punching the throttle and leaving my stomach behind in a way only an EV can. The precision and immediacy of his inputs are almost binary, but this belies a degree of finesse and sensitivity that's making fine adjustments throughout the braking, turn-in and corner-exit phases.

Like Timo we will run in two settings — Drive Mode 3, which is effectively Race mode and yields circa 600bhp, followed by a second run in Drive Mode 9, which equates to Qualifying mode and liberates every last kW the ePerformance has to offer. The former is good for 30 to 40 minutes of racing with no tailing-off of power or performance, while the banzai Quali mode can be sustained for 15 minutes. Again, with no performance drop-off, or 'thermally induced derating' to give it the correct EV terminology.

It's in the heat management of the ePerformance electric motors and battery system that Porsche has made big leaps, thanks to a direct oil-cooling system. This circulates special low-viscosity lubricant through the batteries and the motors via a front-mounted oil cooler to maintain these temperature-critical components at optimum temperature. Because

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Whichever way you slice it, the ePerformance is a whole new level of Porsche GT car

the fluid washes over the full surface area of the battery cells it manages the heat effectively and efficiently.

To allow capacity for regenerative braking to be fed into the battery cells at the first braking zone, the ePerformance starts each session with 85 per cent charge. Porsche says that in the course of a typical race as much as 50 per cent of the total energy used would come from regen, which shows how effective the system is, and how much the batteries have to cope with in terms of rapid charging and discharging.

Talking of rapid charging, the GT4 ePerformance — which employs 900V EV architecture with a charging capacity of 350kW — is charged via a monolithic charging station that Porsche has brought to the test and placed immediately behind the pit garage. It takes the car from 5 to 80 per cent charge in circa 15 minutes. Oh for that kind of turnaround time at your local public charging station.

Driving the ePerformance is an unforgettable experience. One which begins with a pre-flight routine that's laughably simple and eerily quiet. Once switched on, there are a few clicks and whirrs from within the machine. Then all you need do is put your foot on the brake, select your Drive Mode via a rotary control on the steering wheel, squeeze the throttle and away you go. No fuss, no howling petrol engine or fear of being humiliated by a sharp clutch, just a smooth take-off accompanied by a whirr that's mostly drowned out by the whine and crude clatter of the differentials and other rotating components.

Floor the throttle and the soundtrack switches in an instant, a piercing shriek of the electric motors building endlessly in pitch and volume as speed builds. There are no gears, so you just point and shoot. That limits your sense of interaction with the machine, but it does allow you to focus all your attention on what's fast-forwarding through the windscreen.

From the inside it's a maelstrom of those mechanical components combined with the otherworldly sound of electrical energy being deployed under acceleration and harvested under braking. From the outside it sounds like a cross between a gas turbine and a low-flying jet. A gridful of these will make a hell of a racket.

In Drive Mode 3 the performance is stonking up to 200kmph or so, but then you feel the ferocity of the initial acceleration begin to soften a little. In Drive Mode 9 it is on another level, that unmistakable sensation of accelerative freefall feeling pretty much unrelenting. On the start-finish straight the difference in V-max is significant, 600bhp taking you to 250kmph, while unleashing the full 1073bhp slingshots you to 275kmph within the same distance.

That Quali mode speed advantage is mirrored at pretty much every point on the lap, the ePerformance arriving at the braking points some 20-25kmph faster. It's a unique challenge that you simply don't get with conventional ICE-powered race cars, and something that really focuses your mind when trying to slow the car at the end of the main straight.

Braking has always been the greatest challenge in any hybrid or all-electric high-performance car. In a race car it's even more critical because braking efforts tend to be 100 per cent, with little or no margin for error. The constantly fluctuating levels of regen and the need to manage this effect can play havoc with pedal feel, which in turn meddles with the consistency you need in order to nail your braking points with absolute confidence. The GT4 ePerformance has pretty much eradicated all of those issues, though it still requires skill to

Facing page: ePerformance is 14cm wider than a Cayman GT4 Clubsport, with wider wheels (11 x 18in front, 12 x 18in rear) wearing race-spec Michelin tyres with a high proportion of renewable materials

find the limit under braking, but only because you're adapting your technique to find it.

It's a challenge with reward. Unlike 99 per cent of contemporary racing cars, rather than hammering the brake pedal as hard as you can, then bleeding off the pressure as you close in on the slowest point of the corner, you need to apply significant measured pressure that rapidly builds towards maximum braking, then keep it there with sensitive modulation of pedal pressure.

If you're not sensitive enough it's possible to lock, or at least under-rotate, a lightly loaded inside front wheel without being fully aware it's happening. But when you consider you're operating within a ferociously complex brake-by-wire loop, in which braking effort and regen is being continually monitored, balanced and blended between retardation provided by the conventional discs and pads and the resistance from the e-motors when acting as generators, it's a wonder they ever do the same thing twice. The fact you can derive enough feel and control to use your skill to make this system work better is incredible. The enormous effort Porsche has put into understanding and exploiting the unique dynamic opportunities a super-smart all-wheel drive EV drivetrain affords has resulted in some very neat tricks. These are most noticeable — and most exploitable — as you enter the final phase of braking and just begin to point the car into the apex. Once you begin to understand how it wants to be driven, the ePerformance comes alive.

Nail your braking and segue smoothly from middle pedal to initial steering input and you feel the car magically rotate. Not with enough yaw to need rapid correction, but just enough to make you think you do. It's a wonderful sensation, and a behaviour that has clearly been dialled-in to counter the natural balance of the GT4 ePerformance, which tends to push towards understeer if you don't hold your braking deep enough into the corner to initiate the magical rotation.

This engineered agility serves to take some of the burden away from the front tyres, and also tightens your cornering radius, so you can get the car stopped, turned and pointed towards the corner exit without having to lean so hard on the front tyres. From here it's a case of swallowing hard and nailing the throttle, trusting that there's ample grip and traction to fire you out with minimal drama — aside from the rocket-sled punch, which never feels less than dizzying.

The GT4 ePerformance is a sledgehammer in terms of its heavy-hitting accelerative power, but it also demonstrates an ability to deliver the shades of grey upon which driving experiences that live long in the memory depend. That's immensely reassuring, as it shows those qualities for which Porsche is rightly renowned are being refined, reinvented and reformatted in ways that will enable EV sports cars to deliver deeper and more meaningful driving experiences that genuinely appeal to people like us. ☒

Motors Two, 800kW total
Power 1073bhp in qualifying mode **Torque** n/a
Weight 1500kg (727bhp/tonne) **0-100kmph** 2.5sec
Top speed 297kmph **Price** n/a
+ More than just a one-trick machine
− Can those tricks be translated to a road car?
evo rating ★★★★☆

BIJOY KUMAR Y

Bijoy tells us about the first time he drove through Sikkim

THERE I WAS, DRIVING INTO THE CAPITAL city of Sikkim. Roads were extremely narrow and traffic, heavy — as is the case with any hill station in India. But there was something eerily missing — no one was honking. Seriously, it was as if a silent movie was playing and I was in it. It is true, no one honks in Gangtok or for that matter anywhere in Sikkim, unless it is an extreme emergency. No, there aren't any signboards that scream 'no horn', nor are heavy fines being charged by cops for honking. It is just that honking is not in the blood of the Sikkimese. People wait at intersections patiently, even the heavily talented Alto-taxi drivers, and when traffic rolls, they roll too.

That is just one of the charms of Sikkim, an Indian state that took 53 years for me to drive into. And boy, did it surprise me! Gangtok's streets are stunningly devoid of litter. It is as if someone is sweeping the city round the clock — but in reality, people don't litter by habit. The administration is helping too by banning plastics in a big way — you are not allowed to travel with 1-litre water bottles, for example. Extreme? You need to be, to keep your environment clean.

I was part of the inaugural Mahindra Adventure 'Authentic Sikkim' drive and every day of the drive there was something that made me wonder why we didn't do it at an earlier date. To begin with, there is the magnificent peak of Kanchenjunga (8586m) that would play hide and seek with you as you are driving. She is so tall that you will get to see her from most parts of Sikkim. Far away in the horizon at one moment, in your rear view mirror the other. You get so used to the snow-capped peak that you feel an ache when you don't see it where it is supposed to be. Like a constant in your life that you take for granted. Like love for someone close or the innate passion that drives you every day.

You get so used to the snow-capped peak that you feel an ache when you don't see it where it's supposed to be

While there are many touristy things to do in Sikkim, our focus was on good driving roads. Beautiful alpine valleys and (mostly) well paved roads made for some excellent driving days and yes, we were blessed with the best weather one could hope for in the Northeast. Up in North Sikkim, traffic is sparse but one needs to be very alert to keep a reasonably fast pace. The drive to Lachen and then to Gurudongmar lake took us above the tree line and the landscape started looking similar to that in Ladakh. If you have seen Pangong Tso, Gurudongmar might not impress you with its size, but the frozen lake reflecting the peaks around has its own charm and is worth the drive. If you don't try to emulate your superheroes while you are there, the altitude will not mess with you, if not, you might need an ultra-quick descent with a quick driver behind the wheel.

A stunning drive to Nathu La, the mountain pass that linked India to the old silk route and the Indo-Chinese border beckoned the other day. I took a day off to explore Gangtok by foot. As someone very wise (or lazy) said, you should leave something for your next visit! Here is a shout out to all the participants of Authentic Sikkim and the capable hands from IMSC who helped us execute this dream.

To cut a long story short, I recommend Authentic Sikkim to every driving enthusiast and history buff out there. Mahindra Adventure might add a few twists to the route next year, so watch this space.

PS: While on the route we caught up with Priyanka and Nishith who are on a dream road trip to cover 28 states, six union territories and touching upon all four extreme corners of our country. The suitably modified Mahindra Thar, nicknamed Tusker, will be accumulating 25,000km in six months. When we met them, they were already on the road for over four months but looked as fresh as if they had embarked on the journey only a week back. You can follow their adventure at their Instagram handle, *@wander_monkeys*. Here is wishing them all the best and safe completion of their mega adventure. ☒

@bky911

Bijoy Kumar is the founding editor of BS Motoring magazine and now heads Mahindra Adventure

AATISH MISHRA

Aatish has been contemplating getting his own go-kart. Genius or stupid?

THE OTHER DAY, I WAS OUT KARTING WITH the guys from the office and it was an incredibly frustrating experience. On the first run out, I was getting used to the new track, getting familiar with the corners, with where the grip was and what the best lines were. Over the session, I managed to pick up speed and improve my times, while also realising how unfit I was. I was more interested in my second session — because this was where I would push. However, I just couldn't. Since these were rentals, I found myself in a different kart for the second session. It took me a lap to recalibrate to when the brakes where locking up and how much grip there was at each end. And then just when I started picking up speed, the car started bogging down on left-handers. At first I thought I was doing something silly with my inputs. Then I realised it was the tyres. I pulled into the pits, got air filled in the rear right and it improved things. For a whole lap and a half. Then it happened again. The tyre was clearly losing air while I was driving. My big takeaway was — I need to get my own kart.

I picked up the phone and called up Rayo — multiple-time national racing champ who also runs a karting school and a couple of tracks around the country. No better person to ask, really! People do get their own karts, is what he tells me. Apparently, a lot of people in Mumbai are doing this now, particularly the ones that regularly practice and race. So clearly I'm not the only one to have this little brainwave. "If you're going to be doing a lot of karting, it does make sense," he tells me. Well, who wouldn't want to do a lot of karting?

I am seriously considering it. The idea of my own kart does make me a little giddy

I ask him the numbers. A standard four-stroke kart can be bought new from approximately ₹1.5 lakh upwards. Phew, not cheap then. My next thought went straight to the second-hand market — can you get a used kart? North of ₹80k, is what Rayo tells me. Okay, that's a lot more doable. But then it hit me — I also need somewhere to store the kart. I would need to maintain it. Oh, and I would obviously still need to rent out the track to drive on it, no? All sort-out-able, says Rayo. His track, IndiKarting in Mumbai, does give out the track to private kart owners though rental customers get preference. This obviously makes it more practical for a private kart owner to visit on a weekday when the crowds are thin. However, if there are more than a couple of private owners around, you can get two to three sessions per hour, which is reasonable. As for how much it costs, Rayo charges ₹3,800 per day to use the track for an unlimited amount of time.

As for service and storage, the track does undertake upkeep of the karts for a fee. You're obviously going to be paying for parts and tyres. All of this adds up — the initial cost of acquiring the kart and then keeping it running through the year, while paying for track rent every time you do go there. But there are upsides. Your kart is your kart. You can get familiar with how it drives, where its limits are. It won't get banged around as much, because let's be real, no matter how well a track takes care of its rental karts, they are always going to be a little rough around the edges. And you have complete control over its upkeep — you can maintain it to a higher standard and thus derive more joy.

Does it makes sense though? Well, in my mind, it certainly does, especially in a city like Mumbai. Rayo regularly hosts proper races — some six to eight times a year — for fellow karting and racing enthusiasts, and getting your own kart is a ticket into this club. Plus, you get to enjoy this sport to a higher degree. You get to draw out the inherent advantages of karting more effectively. Karting is the foundation of racing and honing your skills on a karting track will most certainly make you a better driver of bigger, heavier machinery on full blown circuits. And at the end of the day — it is a proper, affordable way into motorsport. Maybe not as a career, it's much too late for that. But as a hobby? Why not!

I am seriously considering it. The idea of my own kart does make me a little giddy. Oh, and I am also expecting a call from my mother after she reads this. I can already hear her screech, "Do you really need another ridiculously expensive hobby???" ☒

@whatesh

Aatish is **evo India's** assistant editor and has made it his life's work to ensure interns spend six months on car and bike prices pages

JETHRO BOVINGDON

Jethro is celebrating the shift back to manual gearboxes — with one proviso

I THINK IT'S NOW SAFE TO SAY THAT manual gearboxes are back. The new car market is catching up with what the used market has known for years. Simply put, manuals are more fun than paddleshift 'boxes. You might even say that the manual gearbox is absolutely central to all the very greatest driving experiences. If you want a car that enthrals and involves, it just has to have a stick and a clutch pedal. Undeniably, there's something magical about a great manual 'box. Timeless, simple to operate yet impossible to truly master, mechanical, physical, tactile. They pretty much encompass all the things that we celebrate here at **evo** in a glorious little microcosm.

How else do you explain the clamour for cars like the 911 R or a GT3 with a stick and a third pedal? The gaping chasm in price between a used 575 Maranello with a gated shifter versus an F1 system? The fact that Pagani is developing a new manual 'box for its next supercar? The amazing engineering lengths that Koenigsegg has gone to in order to create a 'box that mimics a six-speed manual (although I can't help thinking just sticking a six-speed manual in the CC850 would have done the trick)? Manuals rule and any car without one is a poorer experience as a result. Fact.

> Porsches are about feedback and tactility. They deserve a great manual 'box

Driving the Porsche Cayman GT4 RS for last month's cover story only reinforced this position. Its PDK 'box is a very good dual-clutch system. Coupled to a lightweight flywheel, that amazing 4-litre flat-six and super-short ratios, it has unbelievable response, incredible shift times and creates its own sense of character as it chunters around at low speeds, too. There's the genuine edge and sharpness of a full racing 'box. I missed the wonderful six-speed manual available in the standard GT4 in about seven minutes. I would happily be a few tenths slower around a lap or much slower on a road full of unknown corners, humps, dips and flicks just to have that extra interaction. To be fully in control. And to enjoy the reach of its engine on my own terms instead of being goaded into living in the final 1500rpm just because it's so easy.

The Honda NSX-R added even greater credence to the theory that manual will always beat paddles. Flicking its beautiful titanium-topped lever between ratios was joyous and unforgettable. I can still feel it, physically feel the weight and the precise action weeks later. And, I'd wager, ten years from now.

The Ferrari 458 Speciale and Lamborghini Huracán STO — the other two contenders on that test — also feature dual-clutch 'boxes. Which is where blind devotion to manual gearboxes comes unstuck. Unlike in the GT4 RS, you never think about how you'd love a manual 'box to really bring the package to life. Not even for a millisecond. The satisfying scrape and clack of a traditional Ferrari manual? Who cares? Once you've felt the full might of a Speciale, ripped through a few upshifts and felt the raw aggression of downshifts, you'll quickly decide there is no gearbox more fitting nor more exciting. The Lambo's, shockingly, is even better. The paddleshift transmission is as defining an ingredient in these cars as the six-speed manual is in the Honda NSX-R. Intense, exciting, deeply physical, endlessly exciting.

This is the great conundrum when it comes to paddleshift versus manual. There is no right or wrong answer. Actually, that's not true. There is a right and wrong answer, but it changes depending on the car being discussed. Do I crave manual Porsches? Absolutely. Despite the brilliance of PDK they always leave me wanting. Porsches are about feedback and tactility. They deserve a great manual. But, say, a Nissan GT-R? No way. The big, brutish, manic experience of Nissan's (formerly) blue-collar supercar needs that industrial, heavy-hitting paddleshift 'box. I would love an Aventador manual. That would be fantastic. But the Huracán wouldn't be the same without its hypnotically accurate dual clutch. Surely a Ferrari 812 Superfast — that most noble of front-engined hyper-GTs — needs a gated manual? Nope. Not one bit. I'd sell family members for an Aston DBS Superleggera equipped with a manual transmission, though. Illogical on the face of it, but if you drove them you'd understand instantly.

Manual gearboxes remain something to celebrate. I am delighted that the comeback is seemingly in full swing. I'm fascinated, too, by the clutchless systems developed by Hyundai and, apparently, the likes of Ford. Simple H-pattern gearboxes with no clutch pedal to negotiate. Who knew Sportomatic would ever make a glorious return? However, even as we celebrate cars such as the Toyota GR86 and fetishise the next GT3 Touring, it's important not to fall into lazy clichés that only a manual will do. From the Alpine A110 to the latest Ford Mustang GT500 to the Bugatti Chiron, some cars just wouldn't be the same without those funny looking things sprouting from behind the steering wheel. ☒

@JethroBovingdon

Jethro has been writing for **evo** for more than two decades and is a host on *Top Gear America*

RICHARD PORTER

It's said we're living in a golden age of television. Porter's not so sure

ALL ACROSS THE LAND THE MOST commonly asked question of the last five years has been, "Have you seen...?" followed by the name of a TV show which, to your disappointment, you haven't. There's so much quality telly drama at the moment it's exhilarating, and also quite exhausting, what with all that glossy and expensive output from Netflix and Amazon Prime and the dear old BBC. It's no wonder you hear it said that we're in a golden age of television. And that's before you remember that, somehow, you also have Apple TV+. At least, you think you have. If you've ever bought a new Mac or iPhone you probably do, possibly without knowing about it. In that respect Apple TV+ is very much the chlamydia of television streaming services. You can walk around for years without realising you've got it. But you probably had it or have it, just from buying an Apple product of some sort. The telly service I mean, not chlamydia. Although, given the absolute crap shoot of trying to pay for anything in one of Apple's shops, I wouldn't be surprised either way.

In *Bad Sisters*, Sharon Horgan's character drives an Audi A5 Cabriolet. Solid car casting...

When I realised I had caught Apple TV+ I watched *Ted Lasso* (which is wonderful) and that one with Jennifer Aniston and Steve Carell being arseholes (which doesn't quite work because Rachel from *Friends* and Brick from *Anchorman* aren't arseholes) and then alighted on something called *Bad Sisters*. You might have seen this advertised or been in a conversation with a friend when they dropped the classic, "Have you seen...?"

If you don't know about *Bad Sisters*, it's an adaptation of a Flemish series called *Clan*, re-written by Sharon Horgan who also stars in it and who, by dint of co-writing *Motherland* and *Catastrophe*, has a recent CV most writers would sand their eyes to match. As you'd hope, *Bad Sisters* has some of that same magic. There's a chillingly unpleasant bad guy, there's a brilliantly free-wheeling antagonist, and there's a beautifully rendered depiction of the warmth and wit at the heart of a family. There's just one issue I have with *Bad Sisters*, one which infests many TV dramas, and which is especially bad here. It's an issue that comes up quite regularly and which leads me to wonder if we really are in a golden age of television after all. I'm talking, of course, about headrests.

In *Bad Sisters*, Sharon Horgan's character drives an Audi A5 Cabriolet. Solid car casting, as it goes. She's the oldest sister, lives alone, no kids, decent job, the A5 goes well with the leather skirt and second bottle of Shiraz vibe that radiates from the character like a heavy spritz of Jo Malone. But there's something wrong: this on-screen Audi has no headrests. With the roof down this gives an interesting cut-price speedster look. But it also makes the seats looks weird, like a herd of headless animals. And the A5 is only the start of it. One of the other characters, a shambolic insurance man played with clammy-handed brilliance by Brian Gleeson, has an old-shape Skoda Octavia, which has also lost its headrests. Except in one or two scenes where they magically reappear. This happens to the Audi too. And to the Volvo XC60 driven by the vile husband at the heart of the story. God, can you imagine how much of a faff it would be to remove the headrests from a Volvo of all things? And yet, somehow, they did.

There's a good reason for this, of course. Modern headrests are bulky and they crowd the interior of the car. They're especially intrusive if you want to frame up a shot looking forward from the back seat, over the shoulders of the two people in the front. Directors like this angle because it gives the viewer the feeling they're sitting in the car too, and a lovely sense of movement through the windscreen. But you're not going to see the characters in the front if there are headrests in the way. So they get taken out.

And this isn't good enough. If there were multiple scenes involving people coming and going through someone's front door and a director decided it would be much easier to shoot if the door itself was unscrewed and thrown away, it's highly likely a producer would say, hold on, you can't do that, it looks daft and everyone watching is going to notice. It would be lazy and unrealistic, yet when it comes to headrests those two things are apparently acceptable. Except, they're not. TV directors shooting scenes in cars, you need to do better. Otherwise I'm going to cancel my subscription to Apple TV+. Assuming I still have one. In this golden age of television it's very hard to know. ☒

@sniffpetrol

Richard is an author, broadcaster and award-winning writer of short autobiographies

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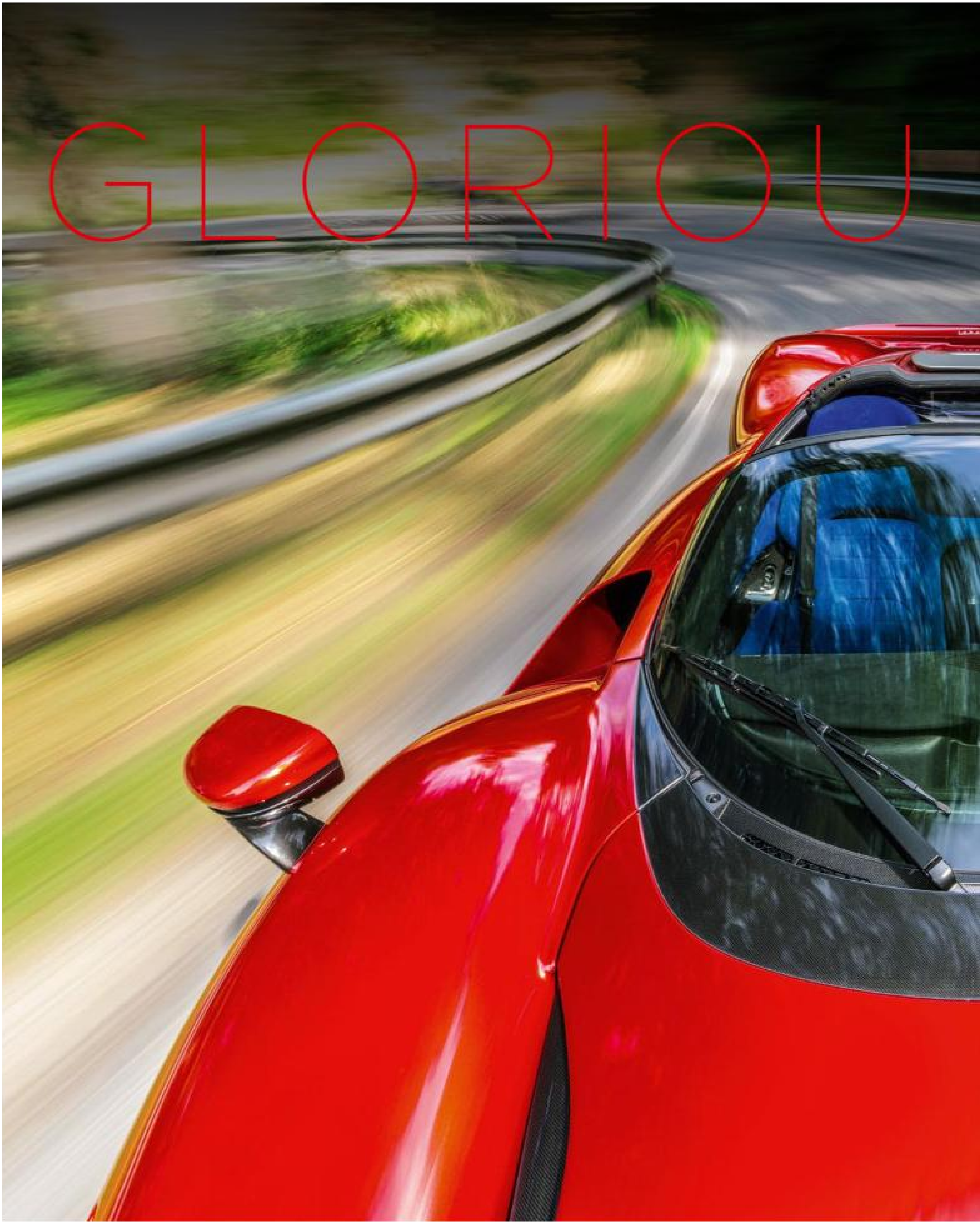

S TWELVE

Inspired by the glory days of sports prototype racing, the Ferrari Daytona SP3 is a stunning homage with pure V12 power. Prepare to be intoxicated

by **ADAM TOWLER**

PHOTOGRAPHY *by* **ASTON PARROTT**

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FERRARI'S ICONA RANGE IS ALWAYS AN INTERESTING topic of conversation amongst those of an **evo** persuasion. The first two offspring of this emergent product lineage were 2018's Monza SP1 and SP2, those windscreen-free, chop-top 812 Superfasts that set out to ape Maranello's sports-racing cars of the 1950s. A wildly exciting way to enjoy a Sunday morning drive? Or a bit self-conscious, perhaps? Certainly it's fair to say you'd need to be a particularly confident soul to tool around in one.

Shudderingly expensive, in a world where you're asked if you want to buy one and not the other way around, the price is essentially meaningless and removed from any sort of traditional logical comparison with cars of equivalent performance or content; you want one, this is what it costs, you pay. Soon Aston Martin and McLaren tried something very similar, with varying degrees of commercial success it must be said, making this bizarre sub-niche one of the most curious motoring diversions of recent years.

Icona, though, is here to stay, positioned alongside the firm's occasional hypercars within the uppermost canopy of the Maranello tree, and if the first two cars took their inspiration from swashbuckling duels on closed public roads featuring Hawthorn, Collins and Castelotti, then SP3 takes its inspiration from a different decade. Now we're into the 1960s and Ferrari's titanic battles with first Ford then Porsche, from the 250P of 1963 right through to the 312PB of 1973. Most of all, we're talking about arguably its most voluptuous and meaningful winner of all: the virtually priceless P4.

It was the P4 that defeated the massed ranks of Ford GT40s on home soil at the 24 Hours of Daytona in 1967, making amends in part for Ford's massacre of Ferrari at Le Mans in 1966, a defeat made all the more bitter after the needle between the two following the failed takeover. 'Daytona' had such a great ring to it that it was applied to the 365 GTB/4, the ultimate front-engined Ferrari supercar of the pre-mid-engined era, and so it's a logical fit for the SP3, a car that channels the aesthetics and vibe of the P4 into a contemporary creation.

This is the fundamental remit of the SP3, but having chatted to the engineers and designers the evening before, it feels like there are additional angles in play. This is a car that has been developed by a group of talented car enthusiasts – people that you'd probably have much in common with — to be fun, emotive, involving, engaging, even if it's at the expense of a lap time or a game of Top

Right: SP3 is based on the carbon tub of the LaFerrari Aperta, with a lift-out roof panel to turn it into a spider; slatted rear bodywork removes heat from engine bay

Trumps. Most of all, in 2022 it's your only route to a new mid-engined Ferrari with a huge internal-combustion V12 and not a battery cell in sight, bar the one that turns the crankshaft on start-up. Suddenly, when viewed through this lens, Icona looks like being the best thing since pre-cut ciabatta…

The core of the SP3 is the fusion of a LaFerrari carbonfibre chassis and Ferrari's thoroughbred F140-series V12. To be more precise, it's the meeting of a heavily redeveloped LaFerrari Aperta tub with the firm's most powerful V12, a revised version of the 'HB' variant seen in the 812 Competizione now christened 'HC'. Now that's the sort of platform and component sharing I can really get behind.

This new version of the 6.5-litre, 65-degree V12 features titanium rods and completely new intake and exhaust systems, the more compact inlet tract liberating more power while torque is maintained by the variable geometry of the system. The big number is 828bhp (at 9250rpm!), backed up by 697Nm at a heady 7250. Those figures alone should tell you plenty about the character of this Ferrari.

It's nearly a decade since the debut of the LaFerrari, so while using its chassis is an entirely logical move when creating a low volume 'special' such as this one, it has also required much work to meet current crash legislation, to the point where virtually no parts are interchangeable. Why use the Aperta? Because in the SP3 the carbonfibre roof panel lifts out, creating a Spider configuration that echoes the way some P4s were raced in-period.

My eye casts down the spec sheet until I see the dry weight of 1485kg, a figure that doesn't feel quite as low as one might expect of a carbon-chassis'd, ₹20-crore super-sports car. Add the necessary fluids and it seems reasonable that we're talking somewhere in the region of 1600kg. Yet we know a LaFerrari weighs around 1574kg with fluids in fixed-roof form, and Ferrari has claimed the Aperta is no heavier, and they are cars with 160kg-odd of hybrid gubbins on board. Ferrari's explanation for the SP3's weight is that some of its extreme design elements aren't the last word in weight efficiency and that the ethos of the car is more about driving fun than ultimate, fanatical performance and weight saving.

Sadly, your money wasn't enough to convince Ferrari to develop a new manual transmission for a true retro vibe (complete with open gate and little metal reverse gear lock-out — just imagine it!) but then again, having both hands on the wheel in a car bursting with this much power and revs may be a good solution after all. I do ask 'the manual' question, naturally, and am told that the last Ferrari manual 'box prototyped was for the California T, and that never got made either…

So you can choose either to be wowed by the Daytona's design and ethos or remain resolutely cynical, but I must admit, as I stand next to 'my' Daytona early on the morning of our drive, it's hard not to let the excitement really run away. Up close, the car seems impossibly massive, great swathes of carbon body receding into the distance from my vantage point next to the door. Its low, swoopy form, intricate details and sheer size are more than a little mind-blowing. For what it's worth, I happen to think it looks spectacularly beautiful from certain angles, slightly more 'challenging' in proportions from others, yet it could be made of toffee and glued-together toilet rolls and it would still possess

I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER DRIVEN ANYTHING WITH QUITE THE STAR APPEAL OF A DAYTONA SP3

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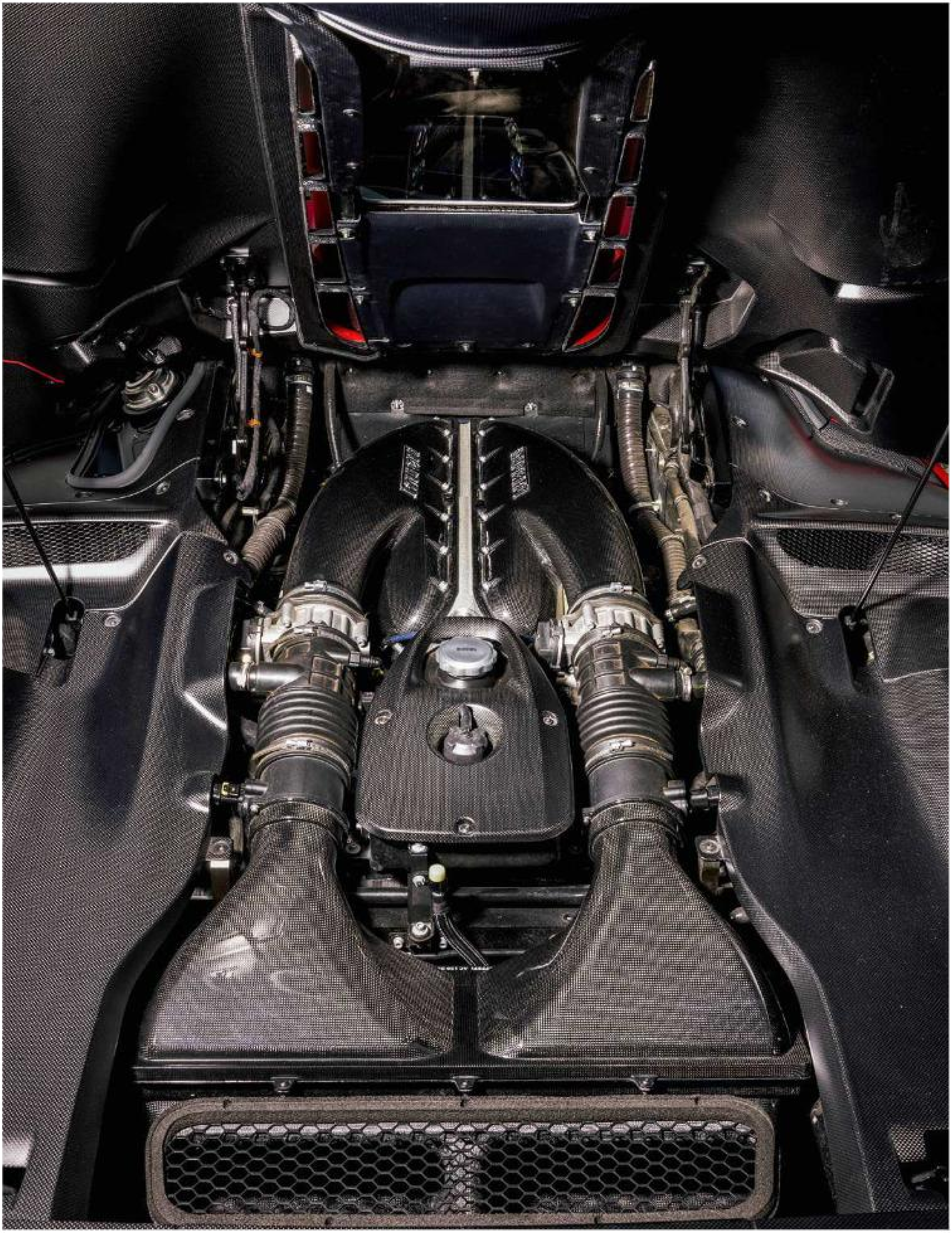


a magnetism like almost nothing else on four wheels. You may scoff at this, and you will surely think what you will about the SP3's design, but what you actually feel in the pit of your stomach when you stand next to it (especially with the delicate metallic slab of a 'key' in your palm) is more like flapping pterodactyls than mere butterflies.

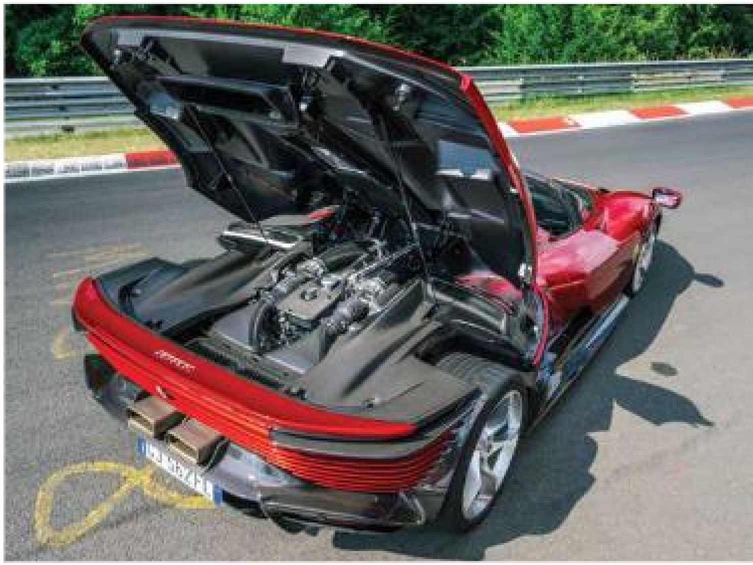
Lift the door up and outwards and the SP3's pod-like cockpit is revealed, the most eye-catching feature being the royal blue seat fabric draped directly over the carbon tub, creating hammock-like seats joined in the middle, apeing the look and feel of a '60s prototype racer. It's a wonderfully effective design motif, at a stroke transforming the modern, hard structure of the LaFerrari into something much warmer and more retro. As a result, the 'seats' are fixed, and the driving position adjustment is via the pedal box and steering wheel, the former made mobile by pulling a cord located at the front of the seat between your legs. It's all wonderful in theory, although for me the execution just falls slightly short as sitting against the bulkhead is almost too upright and I'd prefer to be slightly lower too, as the top of my head is uncomfortably close to popping above the top of the windscreen. Not cool.

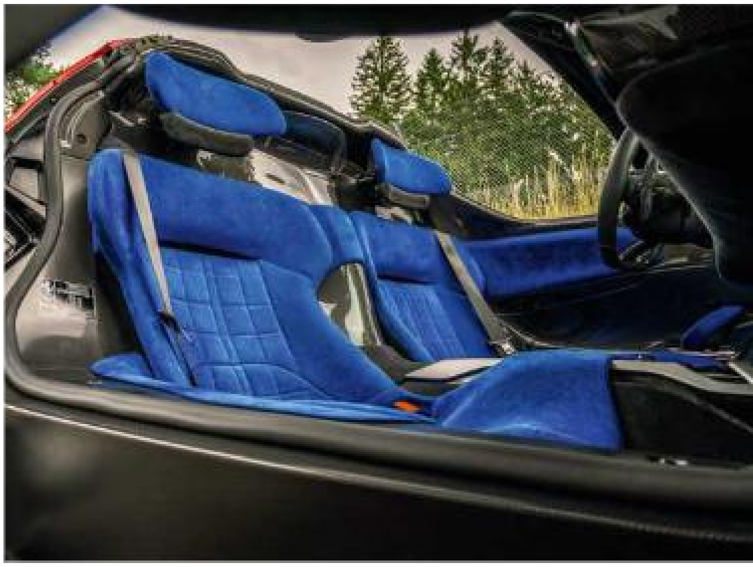
The rest of the interior could be described as fairly minimalist, with most of the displays and switchgear (if we can term the haptic set-up thus) being borrowed from the 296 GTB. I'm not a fan of it in that car and it's no different here, so I resolve to try to use it as little as is humanly possible.

Happily, a distraction materialises in the form of a forceful and expensively complex roar as the V12 spins into life. Rarely has such an expression of latent power been so blatant; while I can't see the big twelve behind my shoulders due to the solid bulkhead, I can almost sense its ferocious appetite for air and superunleaded, and more than ever I know that the next few hours behind the wheel are going to be something extraordinary.

In simple terms, the SP3 drives like a modern Ferrari. If you've had the pleasure of driving any of Maranello's cars of recent times, you'll recognise the traits. As I carefully edge it out of the confines of a small Dutch town and head in the direction of the German autobahn, it's like the proverbial supermodel walking across a muddy farmer's field in handmade stilettos — a completely out of place glamour puss amongst a sea of dreary crossovers and sensible VW Golfs. Consequently, the shockwave it creates amongst onlookers is very amusing. There's a comedic delayed reaction that seems momentarily to suspend the viewer in disbelief until the car has passed, followed by a sudden lurch around, mouth agape. I don't think I've ever driven anything with quite the star appeal of a Daytona SP3.

A small roundabout, leading to an uphill slip-road onto the Dutch motorway. The gentlest squeeze of the throttle and the tail is on the move, my corrective snap of the wrists partly unnecessary due to the layer of ESP still active in Race mode. Hello! I think I'm falling for the Daytona already because it's pretty clear that it's one of those cars where the motor has the forcefulness of character to unstick the rears pretty much wherever and whenever you deem it appropriate.





Left: Naturally aspirated 6.5-litre V12 is an evolution of the unit found in the 812 Competizione, with an extra 9bhp taking the total to 828bhp. **Right:** Hammock-like seats are draped over the carbonfibre tub

Where I don't deem it appropriate is about 45 minutes later, on a lightly wetted Autobahn, at 180kmph, when the car in front moves aside to the middle lane and I gently open the throttle to accelerate past. Again, the software catches it, but my heart-rate soars instantly and my mind is consumed by visions of two million quid's worth of Ferrari pirouetting endlessly down the fast lane as extravagant carbonfibre bodywork is shed in all directions like a naturist finally reaching the appropriate beach.

The V12 is quite something. The extra horses are very much at the top end, and the mapping deliberately chases a definite, old-fashioned power curve, urging you to use all the revs as much of the time as possible. As it stands, using all those revs on the public road is not something to be taken lightly. In second gear, the rev-counter needle seems to just keep sweeping around endlessly, but this is all peripheral-vision stuff because the rate of acceleration is so blisteringly fierce there's no chance of focusing on anything other than the ultimate vanishing point. In this regard the SP3 is unmatched by almost anything else of my experience: it's a frenzied storm of acceleration, be in no doubt. The engine sounds complex, expensive, free-spirited and theatrical, if — to my ears at least — not quite as multi-timbral and musical as you might have experienced in a P4 or 512S.

The light rain curtails my enthusiasm on the autobahn, but by the time the Ferrari's low nose is sniffing out the dry minor routes near the Nürburgring I'm just itching to really see how the SP3 responds when you push it that bit harder. The roads that snake their way through the dense forests and over the gently rolling fields are impossibly smooth, so there's no issue with leaving the Daytona in its stiffer damper setting, although there is Ferrari's ever-useful bumpy road mode available if you require it.

Once you've put aside any trepidation caused by the Daytona's cost and performance potential, it soon becomes apparent that this is a car that's on your side. As fanciful as it sounds, it really does appear to shrink around you, its width becoming much less of a consideration. There's a sense of each corner of the car being beautifully supported in a firm but supple manner, but also one of delicacy, helped by the unearthly throttle response of the V12; it's a car that feels very throttle-adjustable, right down to minute variations mid-corner. Whatever you do, the car responds in turn. A small degree of body roll and pitch communicates the weight transfer beautifully, and as the miles tick by so my own confidence begins to grow — now I'm hustling it a bit, tucking its nose into tighter apexes and feeling its positive attitude to an energetic turn-in. The steering is hydraulically assisted (with an electric pump); light and fast in the usual Ferrari style, you learn to read its subtle interactions as familiarity grows. There's SSC6.1 (Side Slip Control) to allow you to move it around while keeping an invisible protective hand over proceedings, and in truth there's rarely any need to go beyond that stage given the stakes in question. But if you do, particularly when an Aston Parrott-type has suggested it may be time for some 'sideways' for the camera, the SP3 is nothing like as intimidating as you might — quite understandably — have initially suspected.

It helps that it takes so little to break the traction of the bespoke Pirelli P Zero Corsas, and now you're tapping into what those Ferrari engineers have tried so hard to achieve — to make a car

THE GIANT MOTOR OVERWHELMS THE REAR AT WILL. IN THE WET? YOU'D NEED TO BE VERY CIRCUMSPECT INDEED

GJ 562FL

that's fun to drive. When it does slide, it's malleable, predictable and, most of all, fun. The way it comes back into line is entirely progressive — as long as you're really confident with your throttle applications. In the dry, at least, it's not unreasonable to start driving around with a few degrees of attitude here and there on a regular basis, feeling the giant motor overwhelming the rears at will. In the wet? I think you'd need to be very, very circumspect indeed.

By the time we arrive at the Nürburgring, **evo**'s new Fast Fleet F-Pace SVR growling and ticking with the exertion of gallantly trying to keep up, I think I have a very clear impression of the sort of car the SP3 is. But now I'm in for perhaps my toughest ever drive. No, not repeated laps of the Nordschleife in an 828bhp Ferrari — that would surely be some kind of heaven, particularly given that a) Ferrari has booked and paid for the entire northern loop exclusively and b) it's sizzlingly hot today. Instead, the waking nightmare is strictly enforced speed limits, for Ferrari's insurance and because the three Daytonas it has

brought along for the event are actually pre-sold customer cars.

Never has my right foot twitched so much with temptation, the deserted run down to the Foxhole, the climb after Bergwerk, the sweeping downhill toboggan runs of Wippermann and Brünnchen, all completed in a slo-mo trance with my fingernails compressing the rim of the steering wheel and my molars grinding themselves to oblivion. I genuinely consider dropping the hammer, Cole Trickle-style, even if it would surely be my last Ferrari gig, and possibly a P45 moment. Resistance is very hard to achieve.

In a way, it's a nice parallel with the SP3 story. Many of the 599 to be made will exist in cocoons with delivery mileage, kept as an art-piece and/or an investment. Some, however, like the SP1s and 2s that appear on social media reels being enjoyed, will be driven in anger. Those owners who prefer to park up will be missing out, because automotive art always works best on the move, and the real beauty of the Daytona is when it's closing on 9500rpm and those Pirellis are smoking. ☒

Ferrari Daytona SP3

Engine V12, 6496cc **Power** 828bhp @ 9250rpm
Torque 697Nm @ 7250rpm **Weight** 1485kg (dry)
Power-to-weight 566bhp/tonne (dry) **0-100kmph** 2.85sec
Top speed 340kmph **Price** ₹17 crore (before Indian duties)
evo rating ★★★★★

SENIOR SERVICE
3

The Daytona SP3 takes its inspiration from the great sports-racers of the '60s. We look back at a tumultous era that saw some of Ferrari's greatest triumphs but also some of its darkest days

LAPS OF THE GODS

by ADAM TOWLER

WHILE FERRARI REMAINS A GIANT IN THE WORLDS of both high-performance road cars and motorsport, in the early 1960s it was arguably even more of a dominant presence. Consider that it won the 1958, 1961 and 1964 F1 drivers' titles, and that at Le Mans, the race where its name had really been put on the map when it won the first 24 Hours to take place after the Second World War in 1949, it would win seven times between 1958 and 1965. Its road cars had the performance and the glamour, and much of that was bequeathed from the marque's successes on the racing circuits of the world.

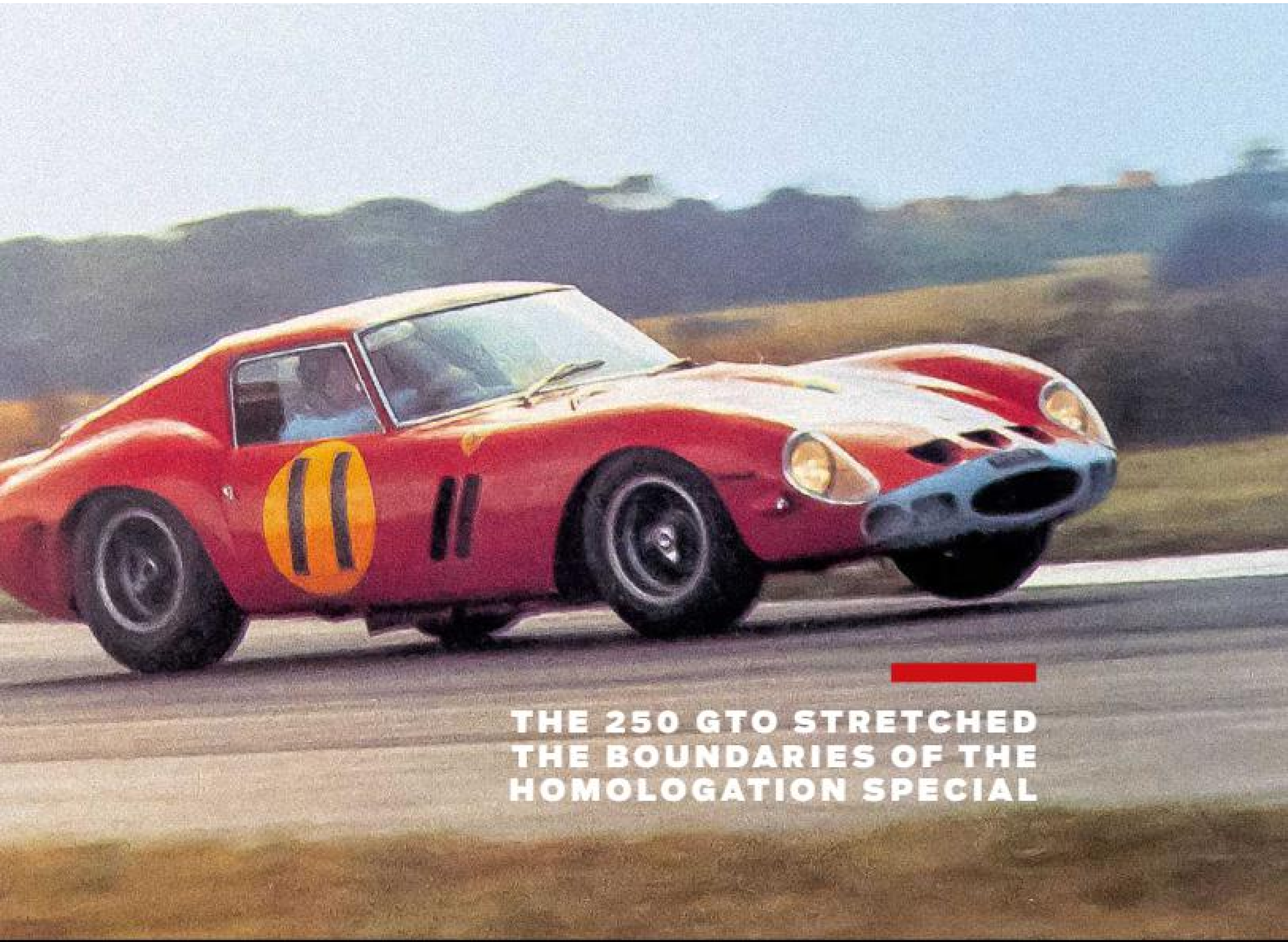
The story of Ferrari in sportscar racing in the 1960s is one of triumph and tragedy, and of a superpower in slow, albeit often glorious, decline. When the flat-12s fell silent at the end of the 1973 season it truly marked the end of an era, for Ferrari would never again compete at the top level of endurance racing. Sure, there were Daytonas and Boxers subsequently in the GT class, Ferrari-engined Lancias in the Group C era of the 1980s, and in more recent years class successes with the 550/575 and the V8 mid-engined cars, but never an outright factory assault for the overall race win. That is until 2023, potentially, when the firm's new Le Mans Hypercar contender is due to make its race debut.

At the turn of the '60s, the Maranello workshops were a busy place, packed with all sorts of delectable sports racers as the company transitioned in part from front- to mid-engined racing machinery. At the 1962 Le Mans 24 Hours it won both the overall race with a front-engined, V12-powered 330 TR (Testa Rossa), and the GT class with the 250 GTO. The latter was a landmark car, picking up where the 250 GT SWB had left off but stretching the boundaries of the 'homologation special'; in effect it was a reworked SWB with a more aerodynamic body, chassis modifications and a Testa Rossa V12 under its shapely bonnet. Ferrari had offered Stradale and Competizione versions of the SWB, the latter featuring an aluminium body and hotter engine, but the GTO was something altogether different and the 36 made got nowhere near the necessary 100 units for homologation. Ferrari got away with it as it claimed they were part of the 250 family, but GT class rivals such as Shelby, Aston Martin and Jaguar were not impressed, and neither were many within the FIA. In time, Ferrari would be made to pay for such rule 'interpretation'.

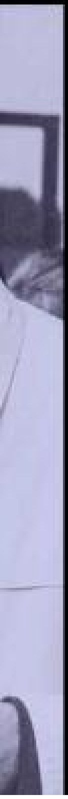
For 1963, genius engineer Mauro Forghieri would design a new entry for the emergent prototype class that would become the first in a legendary series of cars: the 250 P. This essentially took the mid-engined 'SP' chassis of the Dino racers (V6- and V8-engined cars that had been competing alongside the TRs) and placed the V12 behind the driver, the first time it had been sited thus. The 250 P would win at Le Mans and in other major races such as the Nürburgring 1000km, but this was just the beginning.

In '64, the 250 P was updated and became two distinct models: the 275 P powered by a 3.3-litre version of the Testa Rossa V12, and the 330 P powered by a 4-litre 'Colombo' V12, the latter offering more power but increased weight. The Ferrari steamroller continued, with the first three places at Le Mans falling to Ferrari prototypes. A 250 GTO also won the 3-litre GT class, but storm clouds were forming on the horizon in the form of Ford with the GT40 and tough competition from Shelby in the GT class. As Ferrari's finances began to be stretched, its American rivals formed a massive onslaught, and things were moving apace at Porsche, too.

Meanwhile, the other part of Enzo's masterplan had rather gone off the rails. Sensing the days of GT racers based on traditional road cars were past, Ferrari tried to replace the GTO with the mid-engined 250 LM, essentially a closed-roof 250 P with a 3.3-litre version of the GTO's engine squeezed



THE 250 GTO STRETCHED THE BOUNDARIES OF THE HOMOLOGATION SPECIAL



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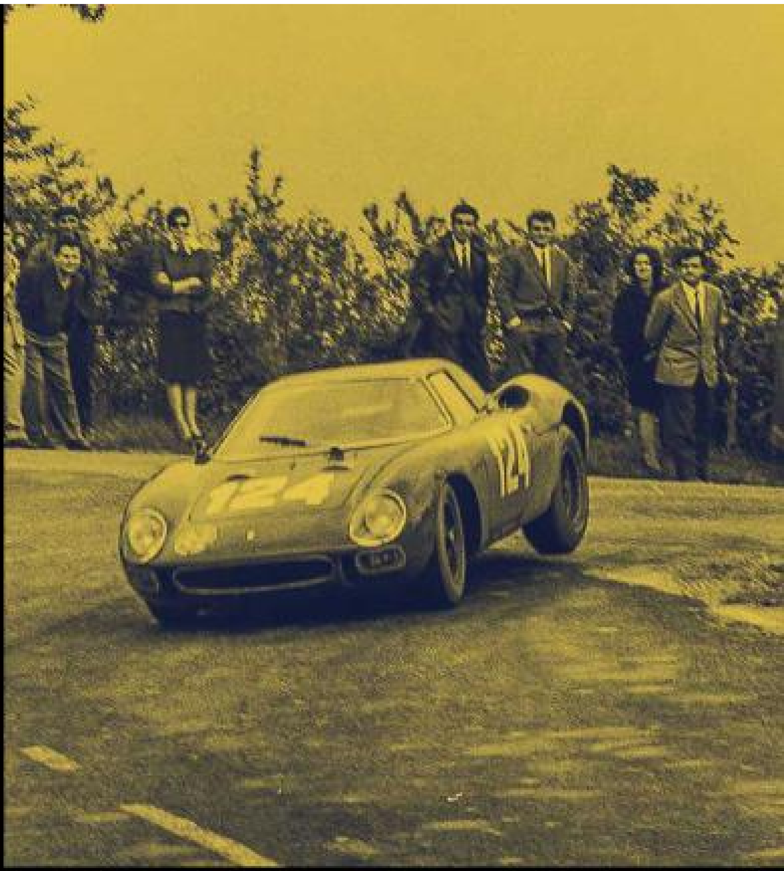
Previous pages: Graham Hill on his way to winning the 1964 Goodwood Tourist Trophy in his 330 P; the famous 1-2-3 finish at the 1967 Daytona 24 Hours. **These pages, clockwise from above :** The immortal 250 GTO — here seen wearing Maranello Concessionaires colours — was a multiple race-winner and the pinnacle of the front-engined GT line; Stirling Moss driving to victory in a 250 GT SWB; Enzo himself was very much at the heart of the racing effort

23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Left: The mid-engined 250 LM was thrown out of the GT class but became a multiple winner as a prototype in privateer hands. **Below left:** The factory entry for the 1967 Daytona 24 Hours, 330 P4s in barchetta (open) and berlinetta (closed) forms, the open version also far left, howling around the Daytona Speedway

into the middle to make one of the most exciting 'road cars' ever made. Unfortunately for Ferrari, this time no one was buying his claims that his latest car met the homologation requirements, and by July it had been thrown out of the GT class. Ferrari indignantly pulled his official F1 entry for the remaining two races in the Americas (hence why John Surtees won the F1 title driving a blue and white Ferrari), but the LM never did achieve GT status, becoming a successful privateer prototype all the same.

Enzo's riposte was another evolution of the P-series, appropriately known as the P2. Once more available in 275 and 330 form, it featured a heavily revised chassis, DOHC engines and a new gearbox. Ford was in the midst of disastrous unreliability with its GT40, but while the P2 scored a number of major race wins, Le Mans eluded it, the '65 victory instead going to Enzo's problem child, the 250 LM, in customer hands — Ferrari's last outright victory in the 24 Hours to date.

Ferrari certainly did not rest on its laurels for 1966, the season immortalised by the recent Hollywood film, unveiling the biggest evolution of the P-series so far, the simply gorgeous P3. A new, indecently voluptuous body, in both barchetta and berlinetta guises, took more notice of aerodynamics and clothed a 4-litre DOHC V12 that now had Lucas fuel injection instead of the traditional carburettor set-up. Power stood at 420bhp, with a dry weight claimed of just over 700kg. Alas, Ferrari's reliability took a dip just as Ford finally got its sorted, and when the lead P3 was taken out of the race at Le Mans in someone else's accident it became a Ford 1-2-3 and a crushing blow for Maranello.

The balance of power had shifted and, with finances tight, Ferrari mustered everything it had to evolve the P3 into a race winner. Although the P4 looked very similar, underneath the skin Forghieri developed a lighter, wider version of the tubular-frame chassis, strengthened by alloy sheet and glassfibre panels, while a new gearbox removed at a stroke the P3's Achilles' heel. The V12 now featured three-valve heads, taken from the firm's F1 engines, and the fuel injection was heavily revised. The weight rose slightly, but the P4 was good for 450bhp and a near 320kmph top speed. Often described as the most beautiful racing car of all time, the P4 sealed its place in the sport's history by finishing 1-2-3 at the 1967 Daytona 24 Hours (the third-place car actually a 412P — a customer version that featured a carb-fed engine to maintain a gap to the works cars).

It was a spectacular season, perhaps one of the greatest known in the sport, with Ferrari, Ford, Porsche and Chaparral battling for honours, F1 stars amongst the driver squads and tracks as diverse as Le Mans, Spa, the Nürburgring Nordschleife, the Targa Florio road race, the Daytona speedway and the old airport at Sebring. Porsche took the Targa (a sign of things to come) and after a titanic struggle at Le Mans, Ford finished first and fourth to Ferrari's second and third places — the Scuderia had lost, but could hold its head up high this time. Winning the championship at the end of the season by two points from Porsche capped the end of an era.

For 1968 the FIA decided that the big prototypes had become too fast, and capped Group 6 at 3 litres. The sport went into one of its periodic downturns, and Ferrari withdrew in protest, meanwhile securing much-needed finance when Fiat took a 49 per cent stake. For 1969 there was the 312 P, a very light Group 6 contender that used the V12 from the F1 cars: it was fast, on occasion, but essentially outclassed by a new kind of endurance racer. The new car was the Porsche 917, and it exploited a loophole whereby the governing body had reduced the number of cars required to be built in the Group 5 sports car class from 50 to 25, effective from 1969 to 1971. This class had a displacement limit of 5 litres, and against all expectation Porsche had made a huge investment to build 25 identical, flat-12-powered 917s, ready for inspection. Flush with Fiat money, Enzo did the same, building the 512S, igniting another intoxicating era… ☒

THE P4 IS OFTEN DESCRIBED AS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL RACING CAR OF ALL TIME by STUART GALLAGHER PHOTOGRAPHY by GUS GREGORY

FRENCH CONNECTION

The 296 GTB will form the basis of Ferrari's GT effort at Le Mans next year. Cue a road trip to La Sarthe

EHF 1
Liberty

A FAST BLAST TO LE MANS IS A MEMORY FOR those of a certain age. Deserted autoroutes, quiet N-roads, gendarmes without the means to record your speed and present a chip-and-pin machine for you to insert your debit card… How different it is today. A cynic would suggest they need the fines to pay for the fuel being burnt by their helicopter keeping an eagle eye on the travelling Brits. Not that speeding should ever be glamorised, but there are more than a few moments on the way to La Sarthe that would create some wonderful new memories if only we were able to let the 296 GTB off its leash and cut a 322kmph wedge through the warm French evening air. But expenses limits aren't what they used to be and car manufacturers take a dim view of their press cars being impounded.

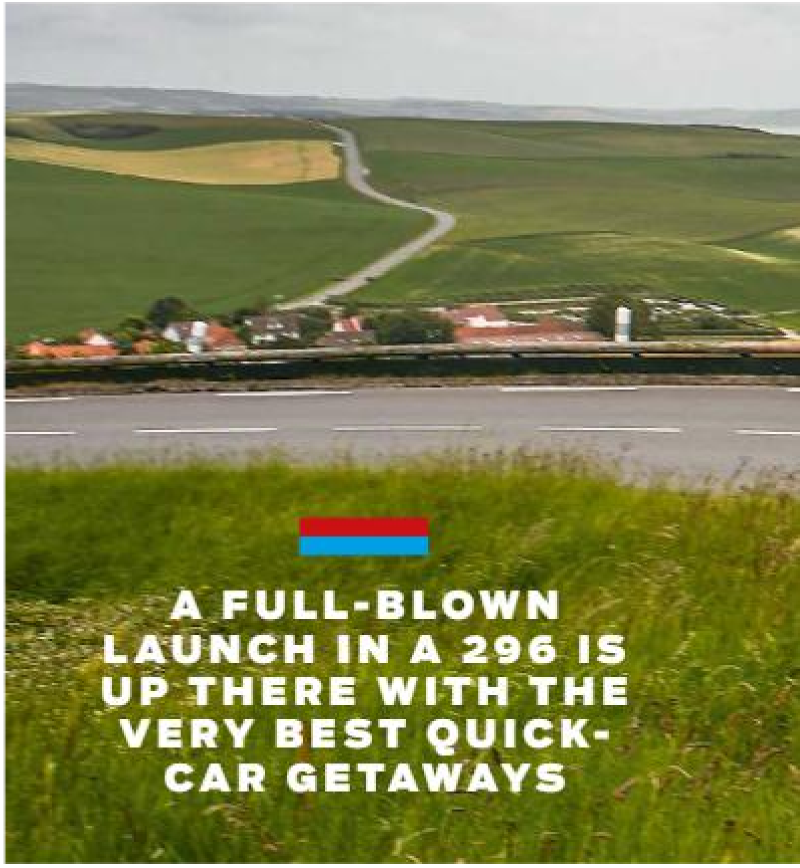
So a cruise it is, but cross-country and away from the stifling boredom of an autoroute. First to Rouen, because if you're going to sit in a traffic jam you might as well do so on the same piece of tarmac that Maurice Trintignant took the triple crown (pole, fastest lap, race win) at the 1954 Grand Prix in a Ferrari 625. Then on to Le Mans, where Ferrari has troubled the scorers more frequently over the years, with nine overall victories — the last in 1965 with the elegant 250 LM — and 35 class wins, the most recent in 2021. From 2023 it plans to be competing for the outright win once again with its new hypercar, while continuing its GT success with a new 296 GT3 car. For this year, though, there's still the current 488 GTE Evo's Le Mans swansong.

It's seven years since the 488 was first presented in race form (called LM and GT3 back then) and six since it made its race debut. Over the intervening half-dozen seasons the 488 GTE and GTE Evo, the latter introduced in 2017, have not only been regular visitors to the podium but multiple championship winners, too. In the 80 races the 488 GTE has contested in the World Endurance Championship, it has won 45 and claimed 24 pole positions, two teams' championships for Ferrari satellite AF Corse (2017, 2021) and three constructors' titles (2016, 2017, 2021). This year Ferrari trails Porsche in the constructors' table, but its *pilotes* Alessandro Pier Guidi and James Calado lead the drivers' standings.

Calado and Co won't have the 296 GTB's full 819bhp available to them in '23, not only because the technical regulations cap the engine output to circa 600bhp, but because the road car's 165bhp electric motor and hybrid system are excluded from the new race car. While leaving such complex systems out of its competition machines allows manufacturers to sell them to other teams, it does leave that uncomfortable notion that the car the tifosi drives to the circuit is more powerful than the one their heroes will be racing. Then again, Porsche races a mid-engined 911…

Calado says he'll miss the 488 Evo. "It's had everything we [the drivers] ask for in a race car: it's been consistently quick, it's strong and it's reliable. BOP [balance of performance] can sometimes make these cars look inconsistent — we can be ahead of the field and cleaning up one race and at the next track it looks like we're in a different class. That's nothing to do with the car, the team or the drivers, it's just the regs. We all have to live with them."

Right: 296 GTB devours distance but also delivers big thrills on par with any recent supercar thanks to its combined 819bhp; rather more than race versions will have


A FULL-BLOWN LAUNCH IN A 296 IS UP THERE WITH THE VERY BEST QUICK-CAR GETAWAYS

BOP has its critics, everyone in and outside of the paddock has an opinion on it, but it has resulted in races that have gone down to the last corner of a multi-hour event to determine a result. "We race flat-out from light to flag," says Calado, the 2017 World Champion and two times Le Mans winner. "The pace we can maintain throughout still surprises some people, but GTE is so competitive it's the only way you can race.

"The challenge is still the same whether we're racing for six, 12 or 24 hours. Just because the pace is like a sprint race we still have to look after the car. Kerbs are still killers, punctures are always in the back of your mind and the team has a strategy we all need to run to. Having a car you can trust removes a lot of pressure." And this is all on top of keeping out of the way of the leading LMP cars and managing the LMP2 traffic, some of which the quickest GTE cars can match for pace at certain circuits if the conditions are right.

Thoughts of the 296 being a complex road car pale against the 488 Evo. On the road there's little you need to do, it's so competent and within itself. Yes, you can tie yourself in knots with the driver settings, switching the Manettino to suit your traction needs, thumbing the driver modes to determine how quickly you want to fry your senses when you provoke the V6 and its electrified partner. And it would leave the 600-plus bhp turbocharged V8 powered GTE trailing behind if both were to line up at the exit of Tertre Rouge and launch themselves along the world's most famous straight from a standing start, its power and torque surplus and that electric kick covering any turbo lag to provide the advantage.

Then at some point you'd need to brake, and turn, and maintain momentum through an apex, and then you'd remember that road cars are never as quick as their racing counterparts. That said, a full-blown launch in a 296 is an experience up there with the very

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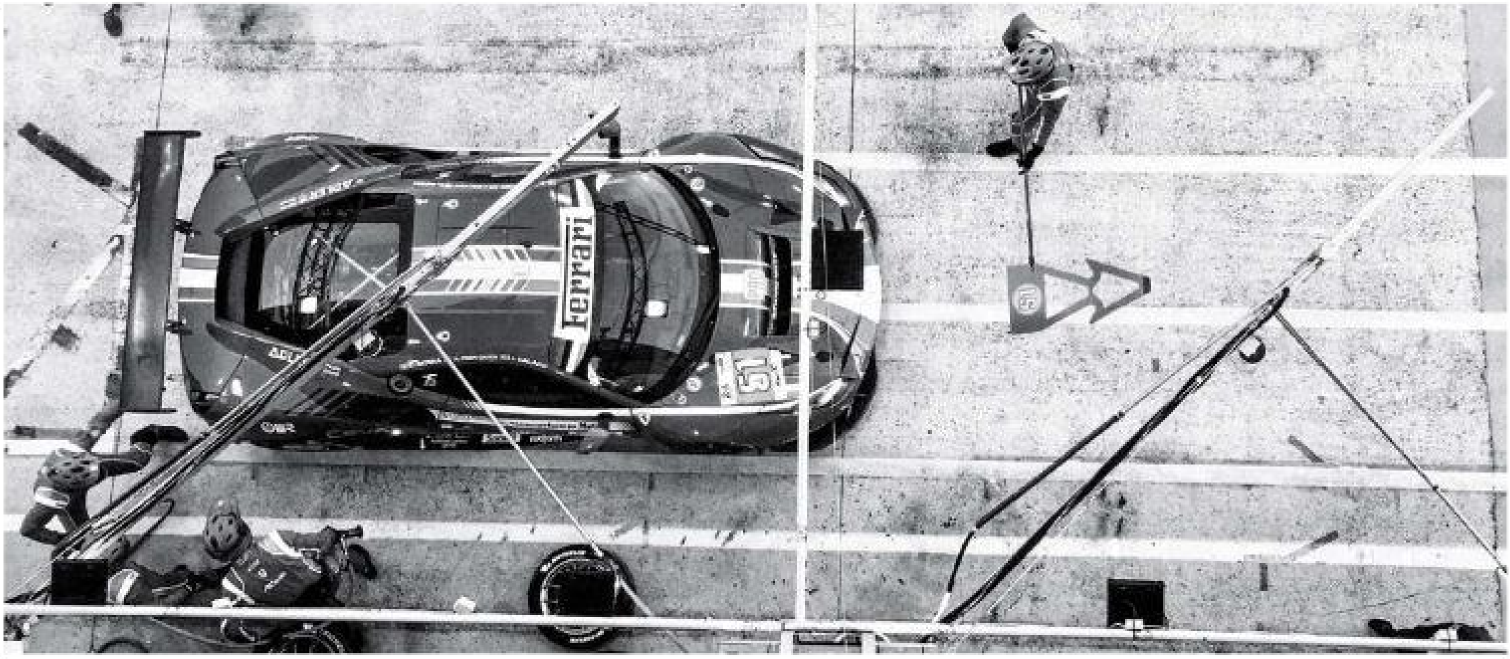
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51

296 HAS PROVED A GAME-CHANGER ON THE ROAD. ON THE TRACK, FERRARI HAS A REPUTATION TO UPHOLD

best quick-car getaways. There's a cacophony of noise, but not from one single source. There's rubber fighting for grip against the road surface, a hungry V6 gulping for air, an exhaust system stuffed with hydrocarbons burning at furnace-like temperatures, the rush of wind as air is directed through, under and over the GTB's body — a body that has more than a passing resemblance to the beauty that was Ferrari's last Le Mans winner. The final sound comes from within the cockpit and it's the 'clack' of the paddle as you climb through another gear, although even the Mulsanne is unlikely to be long enough for you to need seventh or eighth. It would be nice to find out, though…

Racers of next year's 296 GT3 won't need to worry about seventh or eighth gear, because its sequential gearbox will stop at six ratios, a gearbox — designed and built by Xtrac using a magnesium casing — that will be positioned within a car whose wheelbase will have grown by 60mm. Double-wishbone front and rear suspension will hang from each corner, the active dampers of the road car replaced with five-way adjustable items. Positioned on top of the longer aluminium chassis will be a body that generates 20 per cent more downforce than the outgoing car from its fixed splitters and wings.

Ferrari is going early with its new GT3 race car, the regulations not dictating a compulsory switch for manufacturers wishing to compete in WEC or at Le Mans until the 2024 season. With the US IMSA series already running to GT3-type regulations, it makes sense to get in early to court such a large market, and having a year on your rivals this side of the pond is handy, too. But Ferrari will also be entering the Hypercar class in 2023, these complex machines also to be run by AF Corse. "We have the capacity, the know-how and the experience to deliver both programmes," says Antonello Coletta, head of Competizioni GT for Ferrari. "There is a lot of racing experience at Ferrari and AF Corse; bringing two new cars in one year won't be a problem." This may be so, but I still might buy shares in the company that supplies Maranello its espresso.

The 488 GTE Evo missed out on a final Le Mans victory by 42.684 seconds, Calado, Pier Guidi and Daniel Serra finishing behind the victorious Porsche (what else?) of Giani Bruni, Richard Lietz and Fred Makowiecki and ahead of AF Corse teammates Miguel Molina, Antonio Fuoco and Davide Rigon.

Next year will be a sizeable challenge. The 296 has proven itself to be a game-changing supercar on the road, bridging the gap between today's demands and tomorrow's needs with ease. On the track, Ferrari has a reputation to uphold like few others and in long-distance racing faces the fiercest competition in the harshest and toughest environments. If 2023 is going to be one hell of a year for endurance racing, Ferrari is going to be in the thick of it, and it wouldn't have it any other way. ☒

Opposite page: 488 GTE's Le Mans swansong. Relaxed scenes mask steely determination of AF Corse crew; lead drivers Calado and Pier Guidi take a pitlane stroll

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by SIRISH CHANDRAN PHOTOGRAPHY *by* HMI & ABHISHEK BENNY

TO THE MOUNTAINS

Before the passes shut for the winter we head into the mountains for the 2022 edition of the Hyundai Great India Drive, starting at Srinagar and heading across the Zoji La pass to Kargil on the first of this two part series

HYUNDAI
Welcome to Great India Drive 2023

ALL CLEAR, WE ARE GOOD TO GO!” YELLS Harinder ‘Rana’ Siddhu, our convoy leader, harbourer of encyclopaedic knowledge on the mountains, and t-shirt enthusiast. We are on the cusp of winter and as is to be expected, it has been snowing, particularly heavily over the past two days; so much so that the two-wheel-drive vehicles in the convoy have had to be left behind at the start of Sonamarg town. The sun is on the home stretch of its race past the horizon, the wind has picked up enthusiastically, monkey caps are being yanked down over our ears and Rana is strutting around in a t-shirt, immune to both the cold and the overpowering sense of trepidation. We should have been in Kargil by now, tucking into a hot soup and steaming hunks of meat, but all we’ve done is lob a few snowballs, down cups of tea and feel the cold slowly, but surely, make its way into our bones. Zoji La pass, the gateway between Kashmir and Ladakh, is snowed in and even though Rana and his crew have successfully got the BRO to mobilise their snow ploughs, there’s just too much of the white stuff and the pass has remained, well, un-passable.

Until half past five in the evening. That’s when the BRO gets through to our convoy lead and gives him the go-ahead. That is also precisely 15 minutes after I’ve checked into my room at Sonamarg, kicked off my shoes, and sat down with a cup of piping hot tea. The grown-up in me tells me not to be stupid. Crossing Zoji La at night is a fool’s errand and you are no fool. But, as always, the 8-year-old in me takes over. Zoji La at night, opened up just for our convoy, will be next-level spectacular. Luckily for 8-year-old Sirish, he’s in the company of like-minded, erm, kids, and amid the bizarre sight of check-outs happening minutes after being checked-in, we pile into our Tucsons, take one last picture of the sun dipping behind snow-capped peaks, select Snow on the terrain mode, and start our climb up the Himalayas.

Welcome to the 6th edition of the Great India Drive, and say hello to the new Tucson. 12 Tucsons in fact, all packed to the rafters with equipment, luggage and a full compliment of passengers, what with the support crews also piled into the hero cars. On our first drive, held outside of Bengaluru, many of you asked us about how good, or otherwise, the 4x4 system was. Also how good the LED lights were. Today we are going to find out the answers to all that, and more. I even have the answer to the question none of you asked, how good are the seat heaters? With the temperature dipping to minus 2 degrees I can confirm it works very well indeed. And thus with a toasty backside we climb in formation up the mountains, 12 Tucsons making for a spectacular sight, the taillamp graphic reminding me of claws. The claws of a snow leopard perhaps? “That’s being too optimistic,” says Rana over the walkies before slamming on the brakes as a Tibetan Red Fox crosses our path. It’s too dark and the fox is too sly for us to get a picture but Rana, breathless, tells us that sighting this fox is a hundred times rarer than a snow leopard. We’ll have to take his word for it.

What we don’t need his word on is the Tucson’s abilities. Bulldozers have cut a path through the snow but there’s ice, patches of black ice even, and we do not even notice anything. For two hours we climb up to the summit of the pass, passing not one vehicle, the road all to ourselves, an experience that none of us will forget in a hurry. Seventy five million times we told each other what a smart move it was to ditch the warm hotel and head up the icy, craggy, unforgiving and spectacular pass.

THE EASE WITH WHICH THE TUCSON DEALS WITH DIFFICULT ROADS, IS AS SURPRISING AS IT IS UNEXPECTED

Top: Unsoo Kim, MD & CEO of Hyundai Motor India flags off the GID at Srinagar. **Facing page top:** 12 Tucsons driving through Zoji La. **Bottom:** Paying our respects at the Kargil War Memorial

NH1
KARGIL
13

HYUNDAI
India Drive.

Also, the ease with which the Tucson deals with, what clearly looks like difficult roads, is as surprising as it is unexpected — a point rammed in particularly hard when we come across a convoy of special forces headed the other way, their Light Strike Vehicles all shod with snow chains, yet parked up because they were unsure if their 4x4s would make the climb. We were perhaps a touch too brave to attempt the climb, but the Tucson made the drive easy. The diesel engine has enough and more grunt to climb up even though every one of the SUVs in the convoy was loaded to the gills. The handling is as easy as it is surefooted. With five on board it's still comfortable. And they make for a damn good sight, so much so that a 60-second bio-break turns into a 15-minute photography session as iPhones exercise their low-light modes.

For the next hour, descending from Zoji La, the special forces were the only people we saw, and then on from the barrier, we passed mile after mile after many more miles of trucks backed up for three days waiting to head to Srinagar. We should have gotten the hint, realised the mess that would greet us the next day, but we'd planned to pay tribute at the Kargil War Memorial and a bit of traffic would be a small price to pay.

GOD, IT MAKES YOUR HAIR STAND ON END. We are at the parking lot of the Kargil War Memorial, and as typical of anywhere in Ladakh we're surrounded by mighty, craggy, imposing peaks with a generous dusting of snow. Oh what a pretty spot we comment to ourselves, before realising we are in the shadows of the very peaks at the centre of the Kargil War in 1999. We have all read about the heroic battles, we've driven down this very highway multiple times, but it's only when the army jawan points out the peaks — Tololing Heights, Tiger Hill, Batra Top (Point 4875), all right there, right in front of us, clearly visible with the naked eye — that you realise just how shockingly close the enemy had come, squatting on the peaks overlooking the vital NH-1D highway, and just how important it was to dislodge them, no matter the cost. One cannot even begin to imagine the severity of the battles, advancing on the enemy sitting plumb on the peaks, right in their line of fire — the bravery and sacrifice of our armed forces is just mind-numbing. 559 bravehearts laid down their lives in Operation Vijay, and the Kargil War Memorial pays homage to the ultimate sacrifice of the 33 officers, 23 junior commissioned officers, 501 other ranks and 2

WE ARE IN THE SHADOWS OF THE VERY PEAKS AT THE CENTRE OF THE KARGIL WAR IN 1999

BORDER ROADS ORGANISATION
BEACON
ZOJILA PASS
ZERO POINT
ALTITUDE 11649 FT

Top: Perhaps the most epic and frustrating traffic snarl we have been in, heading up to Zoji La from Drass. Fortunately the Tucson has a very comfortable cabin to kill the hours in

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civilians. As we head out the poignant inscription on the archway reminds us, 'When you go home tell them of us and say, "For your tomorrow, we gave our today."'

It gives you the shivers, but also fills you with pride and deep, deep respect.

IN A SOMBER MOOD WE PILE BACK INTO our Tucsons and drive on towards Zoji La, the peaks of the Kargil battle right there, right in front of us, an unshakeable reminder of why these remote regions are filled with army camps and the roads full of army convoys. These are hard, remote, difficult places and in winter, cut off from the rest of the country — but not for much longer. By 2025 the 14.2km long Zoji La tunnel should be complete, cutting the 3.5-hour long drive from Drass to Sonamarg to just 15 minutes. And it cannot come a moment too soon because the traffic jams up on this pass are the stuff of legends. Even though Zoji La has a convoy system where one day traffic goes from Drass to Sonamarg and the next day the other way, the thousands of trucks that were backed up due to the closure over the past three days meant a mind-numbing snarl, cars squeezing past the trucks on the rare occasions when the road opened up slightly, everything struggling due to the snow, and the typical chaos of any traffic jam in India. It turned out to be a great opportunity to experience the comfort of the Tucson, the ease of driving, the lovely sound system, the sunroof that lets you admire the snow capped peaks towering above you, the ease with which the AWD system deals with snowy roads, and by the evening the excellent headlights. It took us until evening to get to Sonamarg, the usual 3.5-hour drive taking 8 long, tedious, frustrating and hungry hours.

Except that's not it for this edition of the Great India Drive. We get into Srinagar late at night, exhausted I hit the bed without even taking off my shoes, and the next day I hand over the Tucson to Aatish who heads back to Zoji La. The theme of this edition of the GID is 'On Top of the World' and we're literally heading to the top of the world, the Umling La pass, the world's highest motorable road. It's an ambitious ask, what with the passes getting snowed in, but **evo India** is all about epic challenges and — up until now — the Tucson has proven to be up to the task. Now we dial things up! ☒

Don't miss part two of the Great India Drive in the Jan 2023 issue where we attempt to scale Umling La in the winter!

by **JETHRO BOVINGDON** **PHOTOGRAPHY** *by* **ASTON PARROTT**

POWER

e-tron
#Future Is An Attitude
e-tron

UP!

Audi's monster Dakar desert racer combines electric motors from Formula E with a detuned DTM petrol engine in one extraordinary package. Hold on tight as we put it through its paces

IT MUST BE SOME TIME IN THE LATE ’80s. ‘The Ride of the Valkyries’ is ringing out of a cathode-ray TV pushed into the corner of the living room at my parents’ house. I’m pretty much mesmerised as cars float over the desert floor, motorbikes elegantly glide from one ascent to the next and, as the music reaches its zenith, a huge racing truck flies from atop a colossal dune in slow motion, sand cascading from the treads of its tyres. It’s like the world has been whipped from beneath its wheels and a wide-eyed young Bovingdon feels like the rug has been pulled from everything I know, too. What is this magnificence unfolding in front of me?

The footage is a promo piece on Eurosport for the upcoming Paris-Dakar and it is balletic, exotic and deeply enthralling. Over the next couple of weeks I’m obsessed: consuming the daily highlights packages voraciously, reeling at the thought of a 10,000-kilometre race, falling under the spell of the giant support trucks that race alongside the cars and seem just about as fast. There are tragic deaths, tales of bandits, crashes that leave the landscape littered with debris, and drivers and riders who look broken, elated, dazed and, mostly, out of their minds. The Paris-Dakar seemed like a fable that Marco Polo would dream up. Rally Raid. Even the name had a fairytale quality to it.

My love affair with the idea of the Dakar has never ended but, strangely, I’ve never really followed it closely since. Instead, I’ve wanted to hold on to the sense of mystery and myth that shrouds this epic, other-worldly race. Even now, in a time when access to coverage is so much easier, I tend to look on from afar at the Dakar. Like it exists in another universe. Untouchable, unknowable.

Maybe that was better. On a freezing morning, high up in the hills of Sardinia, my world and the world of the Dakar have collided. And it doesn’t sound enticing. At all. And that’s despite the dusty, narrow, bumpy rally stage and the team of engineers and mechanics buzzing around the outrageously proportioned Audi RS Q e-tron that I will be driving very, very soon. This should be the dream. And it is. Until a serious-looking man from Germany begins his driver briefing.

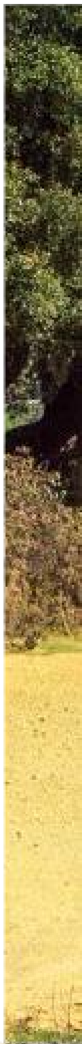
Mostly it’s the usual stuff. Be cautious at first, build up your pace, don’t crash. But the e-tron requires new information, too. “If there’s a problem with the car and it stops on the stage, stay in the vehicle. Even if the light is green. We will come and assess things and give instructions.” The e-tron is an EV. Of sorts. It has a light system to inform driver, co-driver and anybody assisting during a breakdown or in the event of a crash when the car is safe to touch. He continues, now in an even more forceful tone. “Unless it’s on fire. If there’s fire get out immediately. Inhaling the smoke from a battery fire will create life-long health issues.” There’s a nervous laugh from the assembled journalists. The German man is not laughing. Or smiling.

I’ll admit that the safety briefing knocks me from my stride just a bit. Although, to be honest, there was something vaguely surreal about this trip and this vehicle from the outset. The RS Q e-tron didn’t win the Dakar. This isn’t a media victory lap. Audi’s all-star driver line-up of Carlos Sainz (three-time Dakar winner), Stéphane Peterhansel (six-time winner on two wheels, eight-time winner on four) and blisteringly quick Dakar rookie Mattias Ekstrom (two-time DTM champion, World Rallycross champion) won four legs of the 2022 event, which is now held in Saudi Arabia. However, despite flashes of real speed, Ekstrom just squeaked into the top ten to finish ninth overall, Sainz was 12th and Peterhansel way down in 59th. This is not the sort of result Audi would usually crow about. Audi wins. Always.

So what’s going on here? The clue is in the name — e-tron. Can you imagine the ingenuity, the effort and the engineering mastery required to complete the Dakar with an EV? What a story! This is why Audi has brought us to Sardinia and is happy to let one of its extremely precious, spectacularly tough and simply huge RS Q e-trons out to play in a giant sand pit. As I roll out from under the technical area and towards the course, the thump of my heart is drowned out by the piercing, high-pitched electric motors located on each axle. The steering is freakishly light and conveys zero information about what those huge tyres are biting into, but I squeeze the throttle anyway. About halfway through its arc, an internal combustion engine booms to life behind me — and sits steady at 6000rpm no matter what my right foot does.

So, this is the curious case of an ‘e-tron’ fitted with a 2-litre, turbocharged four-cylinder engine from Audi’s previous DTM programme. A heinously complex vehicle developed in partnership with Q Motorsport, a Rally Raid specialist outfit run by Sven Quandt. Yes, that’s Quandt as in the family who own the majority stake in BMW. I told you it was a curious case…

In essence, that repurposed DTM engine is a range-extender. Power is reduced from over 650bhp to around 270bhp. It powers an electric motor that in turn charges a 52kWh battery, which then powers an electric motor on each axle. The motors themselves are



Right: Rally stage in the mountains of Sardinia provides a tiny taste of what the crews had to endure on this year’s Dakar. Our man Bovingdon (far right with co-driver Edouard Boulanger) learns how to get the best from the e-tron

e-tron

Facing page: Remote reservoir dampers and massive underbody protection take the pain out of heavy landings; cockpit is pure rally car, with the handbrake just a short stretch away

taken from Audi's Formula E programme. The fact that the internal combustion engine has no direct connection to the wheels is why it runs at steady revs. The battery could provide up to 671bhp but due to regulations the output is limited to 387bhp and top speed pegged at 180kmph. There's no centre differential but instead a 'virtual' diff that alters the torque split depending on conditions and driver preference (Sainz likes a more rearward bias than Peterhansel). The RS Q e-tron carries 300 litres of fuel as well as that 370kg battery pack around.

Inside, once you've threaded yourself through the complex roll-cage, there's a strange mix of modern race car and elevated, almost SUV-style driving position. A kind of GT3-spec Porsche Cayenne, if you like. The seats, the sense of claustrophobia, the bracing and various control panels are pure race car. However, the RS Q has additional screens for the co-driver and although the steering wheel features various buttons and acts as a control centre as you might expect, the size of it and its roundness are a world away from the wheel in a modern circuit racer. Oh, and there's a hydraulic handbrake just where you'd want it. Maybe a Q8 WRC is a more accurate description.

The chassis is tubular steel, reinforced with carbonfibre panels and tear-resistant Zylon in places, too. The battery is located beneath the seat and under-leg area of driver and co-driver and benefits from a multi-material protection cell designed to withstand jumps, rock intrusion and all the stuff that only the Dakar serves up. The underside, for example, is shrouded in a 54mm thick structure consisting of a layer of carbonfibre for intrusion protection, absorption foam for dissipating the energy of rock strikes or extreme landings, and finally an aluminium plate to handle the initial impacts. The whole piece can be swapped in the bivouac when necessary, but even under the duress of the Dakar none of the vehicles required such maintenance. Today's tight, technical course holds no such fears. Maybe that's why Peterhansel's co-driver, Edouard Boulanger, seems so content in the passenger seat. "You'll understand the car soon enough," he chirps over the headset. "It's very simple to drive."

He's absolutely right. The RS Q e-tron requires so little physical effort to hustle, it soaks up wickedly testing terrain, and despite weighing well over two tonnes you never get the sense that its momentum could get away from you. There's just an incredible sense of freedom. It really is as if everything I know is wrong. Rather than connecting you to the surface, Audi's Dakar machine almost seems to remove it from the equation. Just concentrate on your line, on nailing those braking points and getting on the power as early as possible. The clever virtual diff and the stupefying Reiger remote reservoir dampers will do the rest. From the outside it's all churning dust trails, extreme lean angles and dramatic oversteer. It looks heroic yet feels oddly calm. The Dakar is about endurance and consistency. Speed is a factor too, of course, but the RS Q e-tron's raw pace is a by-product of its drivability.

Peterhansel had told me how easy the car is to drive, but it's quite amazing to feel so comfortable so quickly. "The way the electric motors deliver their power is so predictable," he said. "This creates confidence and then… precision. No gears to worry about, no lag, just where you're going and the very best line to get there. We are too heavy, but otherwise the car is fantastic." The minimum weight is 2000kg for this class but the e-tron is more like 2250kg without the crew aboard. You feel the weight in the way the nose dives under braking and the roll and pronounced squat as the corners open out. But whilst the sheer mass is tangible and affects the e-tron's gait, there's always a sense that the weight is being manipulated and controlled. Everything is checked at a certain point, just when you need and demand immediate response. It really is oddly precise and wonderfully fluid.

Seat-time in the RS Q e-tron is predictably brief and most of it is spent trying to master the hydraulic handbrake and the way the car distributes its power through the tight, technical turns. The balance is closer to, say, an Impreza than something like a GT-R. Try to drive it without the handbrake and it tends to wash into understeer and then, should you have the space, drive into oversteer when you commit to the throttle. So, it's best to arrive already pointing at the apex (a quick tug of the handbrake does the trick) and then flatten the accelerator to haul the car straight. I maybe get two corners absolutely nailed in the entire run. But they'll live long in the memory.

Against expectations, almost none of my time is spent thinking about the odd hybrid drivetrain. The noise is dominated by electric whine to such an extent that the internal combustion engine becomes a distant, background thrum. The cynic in me thinks the e-tron label is a bit of a misnomer, marketing rather than engineering-led. However, it doesn't lessen the achievement of making three Formula E motors and a DTM engine work in the most inhospitable conditions, nor reduce the fuel saved over a race distance. The RS Q e-tron is a hugely capable, deeply intriguing and slightly absurd monster of a Rally Raid machine. The glorious, bizarre, hypnotic and plain brilliant Dakar rally deserves nothing less. ☒

Audi RS Q e-tron

Powertrain Three electric motors, plus 2-litre petrol engine (generator) **Power** 387bhp (Dakar spec) **Weight** 2250kg **Power-to-weight** 176bhp/tonne **0-100kmph** <4.5sec **Top speed** 180kmph (limited)

evo rating ★★★★☆

SEA
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CHANGE

The HyCross completely revolutionises the successful formula of the Innova, and takes massive strides forward in the process. Is it what we need though?

by AATISH MISHRA PHOTOGRAPHY *by* ROHIT G MANE

T STARTED UP IN ABSOLUTE SILENCE. I SHOULD have expected it — I obviously knew this was the hybrid — but somehow my brain was caught off guard. I guess it expected the whine of a starter motor and the clatter of a diesel engine, noises that we've gotten so accustomed to when we think of Innovas. This was different. Silent. And silence is a luxury. Rolling out of the hotel porch, twirling the light steering with one hand, the Toyota Innova HyCross immediately felt like it was punching in another space now — the silence elevating the experience, not to mention the million other changes under (and on!) the skin that make it so different from the last. There's so much to address here — the switch from a ladder frame to monocoque, the change to a hybrid drivetrain, abandoning the diesel engine, switching from RWD to FWD — in addition to all the styling and interior updates. The two hours I had with the car isn't enough to tell you what it is like to live with, but more than enough to give you an impression of what to expect should you put money down for it.

On the face of it

First, there's the styling. More upright, more aggressive, more SUV-like if you may. Toyota has taken a number of things out of the SUV playbook. Look at the angle of the bonnet for starters, more upright than the Crysta ever was. There is the black cladding that runs all around, another SUV touch. Even the D-pillar has been tweaked to look more conventional. It's a good looking car with massive presence. Parked up next to the Crysta, the HyCross could well be booming 'All Eyes On Me' from its JBL system with a completely straight face. Interesting things to note — the wheels are a size up from the Crysta, with 18s on this top end variant. It has grown as well, with the HyCross being longer and wider. Most significant is the 100mm increase in wheelbase though, which frees up plenty of room on the inside.

The insides are just as radically revamped — new steering wheel, new instrument cluster, new dash layout. In the instrument cluster, there's a 7-inch display for the speedo and MID, flanked by analogue dials for the tacho, fuel and temperature gauge. The dashboard gets a 10-inch infotainment screen (with Android Auto and CarPlay, though wired), and notably the gear selector has been moved from the centre console to the dash. Now I saw a few comments on our YouTube video criticising this, but I actually like it. The gear selector is easy to reach, not that you need to once you slot it into D — and it frees up space below for two large cupholders and a big storage within the armrest. Win, win, in my books. The only issue is there's no tray to store your smartphone in, and the two cupholders were transformed into a phone storage space on our drive. Good thing there are two more cupholders under the side air-con vents then!

Materials used on the inside are good, and there's a generous use of soft touch leatherette on the door pads and the dash. It takes a step up in terms of equipment as well — the front seats are ventilated, they are electrically adjustable and even have a two-setting memory function. There's a 360-degree camera, panoramic sunroof, a JBL sound system and the rear section gets its own climate zone. This top-end variant also gets ADAS features including lane-keep assist, adaptive cruise control, auto high beam and a blind spot monitor. There is also a wireless phone charger and a TPMS system available as optional extras. That lack of a tray has forced Toyota to place said wireless charger on the dash in front of the co-driver. Odd position, in my opinion.

Facing page, bottom: The instrument cluster is a mix of digital and analogue, with plenty of information; the 10-inch infotainment screen sits in the driver's line of sight

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THE TOYOTA INNOVA HYCROSS IMMEDIATELY FELT LIKE IT WAS PUNCHING IN ANOTHER SPACE NOW

R
N
D·S
HOLD
DRIVE MODE
EV MODE
OFF

From top to bottom: Hybrid badges adorn the flanks and tailgate; EV mode allows you to drive only on battery power if there is sufficient charge; the hybrid drivetrain powers only the front wheels

Getting comfortable

The second row is probably the most important place to be in the HyCross, and Toyota has paid it appropriate attention. Firstly, there's the wheelbase that has increased a whole 100mm (now 2850mm) to free up more knee room. And knee room is more than generous, with the sense of space exaggerated by the flat floor. The second row slides on rails and in a mid setting, I have more than enough knee room for my 5-foot-10 frame. Slide it all the way back, and I can genuinely stretch out more than I ever could in the older MPV. Mind you, you cannot tuck your feet under the driver's seat though because that's where the batteries for the hybrid system are. The seats also have electrically controlled ottomans and can recline near horizontal to get you in a lying down position. However, the ottomans have a limited use — lift them too high and your feet ride up against the front seats. The solution to that is to use the seat on the left, while the front seat is pushed and folded all the way forward, chauffeur style. That genuinely allows you to fully stretch out, make full use of the ottoman and recline. You also have a small foldable centre tray in the second row though it did feel a little flimsy, and while the air-con vents were on the roof, you have the controls in a more conventional position.

The third row was a revelation — the switch to the new TNGA-C monocoque platform (shared with the Voxy minivan) means the floor can sit lower and the lack of RWD meant there is nothing to get in the way of the engineers maximising space here. Firstly, the seating position — your feet sit much lower than the seat and this means you aren't in the knee-up position most third rows are

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guilty of putting you in. Then there's the space. With the second row in a middle setting, I had a couple of inches of free knee room in the back! That's really commendable. Headroom was just about adequate as well. Hideki Mizuma, chief engineer of the Innova HyCross did mention that getting the glass area right with the revised D pillar was a huge challenge, but they have done a good enough job. This is a third row that adults can genuinely sit in and travel for reasonable distances without discomfort. This third row can also seat up to three, though any more than two will be a squeeze as shoulder room is limited.

As for boot space, you do have some room with all three rows up — enough for a couple of small duffel bags. Fold the third row down and you have a total of 991 litres of space which is mighty generous. The second row obviously won't fold down in this spec with captain seats, but that space is more than enough for most.

Best of both worlds

The Toyota Innova HyCross comes with two engine options — one a pure ICE with a 2-litre petrol engine, while the other is a hybrid. Both are front-wheel-drive and both are automatics, there's no manual on offer. The hybrid is what we drove — it gets a 2-litre engine based on Toyota's fifth-generation hybrid architecture. Power and torque stand at 183bhp and 206Nm. But this system is more than numbers, what matters is how it feels. And on first impressions, it was really good. Like I said, you set off in silence and that does add to the novelty. The petrol engine does kick in at some point — there's no specific speed and it depends more on the level of charge in the battery and the sort of acceleration you ask of the system. I found myself doing around 40kmph comfortably in EV mode, and the engine only firing up when I asked for more shove. However, it still remains a refined, quiet experience even with the engine having kicked in — but that's as long as you aren't demanding too much of the performance. Drive it in a calm manner and there's little to complain about.

However, when you do try to wring the most out of the engine, it gets vocal. There's a very limited rubber-band effect going on, but when the engine is spinning hard, you will hear a fair bit of it. What about performance? Well, it's brisk that's for sure. Toyota claim a sub 10-second 0-100kmph time which is commendable and it does feel quick off the line. It does weigh a whole 200kg less thanks to the new platform, remember? That said, diesel Innova owners will miss that slug of torque which allowed the Crysta to accelerate, climb and heave its heavy load almost effortlessly. I haven't driven this HyCross fully loaded yet, but I do suspect replicating that character will be a challenge. The drive modes do make a difference, with Power mode giving it more poke (throttle responses get sharper and it accelerates harder) but not nearly enough to replicate the grunt of the diesel. Good thing then, that the diesel lives on in the Crysta that will be sold alongside this!

The other aspect of the hybrid motor is the efficiency but we really didn't have the car long enough to get an accurate idea of it. With a mix of shooting and driving, I saw around 14kmpl on the display but, again, this is far from representative of real world conditions and I would need a longer test to be able to confidently tell you about this hybrid system's efficiency.

IT DOES WEIGH A WHOLE 200KG LESS THANKS TO THE NEW PLATFORM, REMEMBER?

Clockwise from above: Massive panoramic sunroof uplifts the cabin; the third row can comfortably fit an adult; second row seats are the place to be; 18-inch wheels on top-end variant

The hybrid system really suits the HyCross' character though. With the interiors moving up a rung in terms of luxury, the drivetrain feels like it has moved up in terms of the experience it delivers. Not in terms of outright performance, but the silence, refinement and vibrations that make their way into the cabin. It feels more upmarket, taking the HyCross in the exact direction Toyota want it to go.

More steps up!

Let's talk ride. The car feels more sophisticated in the way it goes down the road, that's the overwhelming sensation you get when you drive it. There's a sense of planted-ness to the chassis that was not there before, and it rides better over an average Indian road. Smaller bumps, undulations in the road and breakers are dealt with effectively despite the 18-inch wheels. The suspension itself is softly sprung and soaks up most of it comfortably while good damping keeps body movement in check. Ground clearance is good too. Toyota didn't share an exact number with me, but it is in the ballpark of the Crysta. Some really massive breakers on our test route didn't phase it. The only thing is, you can't hammer it over broken patches like you did the older MPV. That overwhelming sense of indestructibility isn't something you get from the HyCross, and I found myself slowing down more for patches of road with deeper potholes and bumps.

Coming to the handling — there have been massive strides in this department as well. It feels far more composed around a set of corners, again the new platform completely changing its behaviour. The steering feels direct and more connected to the front end. It's lighter too — making the whole car feel less cumbersome to drive. The front end reacts more naturally, and the car behaves more predictably in the corners as well. It gives you an overwhelming sense of confidence to drive the Innova HyCross through a series of bends. The Innova was never a poor handler or anything, but this just refines things and takes out those inherent disadvantages of the body-on-frame platform.

Much like the engine, the chassis delivers a superior level of sophistication in both the ride and handing departments. It makes the HyCross a far nicer MPV to drive, like a car that you wouldn't mind taking over the wheel of, should you need to take a break from that back seat.

The big question

The price! We should know for sure some time later this month when Toyota makes the big announcement, but for now, all we can do is guess. I suspect the fully loaded trim that we were driving will come in the region of ₹30-32 lakh, commanding a fair premium over the Crysta (which will continue to be sold, targeted obviously at the fleet market). Its only real rival in that space is the Kia Carnival (of which there's an all-new model already out globally), and I think it will do well to undercut it. The other question that remains unanswered is if the monocoque platform can deal with the same amount of punishment as the ladder frame. Mizuma-san seems confident that the HyCross will be able to live up to the reputation of its predecessors when it comes to reliability.

For what it is, the HyCross is an exceptional upgrade over the Crysta. It looks good, the interiors are well thought out and genuinely useable for seven, there is that sophisticated hybrid powertrain, and it rides and handles much better than the ladder-frame MPVs of the past. It is a step up on the Crysta, in every single objective way and it has what it takes to fill in the big boots of her illustrious predecessors.

Toyota Innova HyCross

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1987cc, petrol hybrid **Power** 183bhp @ 4000-4400rpm **Torque** 188Nm (engine) & 206Nm (motor) **Weight** NA **Power-to-weight** NA **0-100kmph** 9.5sec (claimed) **Top speed** NA **Price** ₹32 lakh (estimated, ex-showroom)

evo rating ★★★★☆

GT
IND MH14KJ2874

STYLE

We reminisce about the beauty that traditional sedans have always possessed with the classy and sporty Volkswagen Virtus GT

STAR

by ROHIT NALAWADE PHOTOGRAPHY *by* ABHISHEK BENNY

IT ALL STARTS WITH THREE BOXES AND ends up in a life-long obsession with cars. Before enthusiasts played top trumps, and before us motor noters started to wax eloquent about the Thrill of Driving, our love for cars stemmed from a common place — sketching a three box 'car' in our school notebooks. We have always associated sedans as the ones bearing the fundamental styling elements of a car, but of late, the popularity of the sedan has taken a hit, thanks to the various new varieties of cars and SUVs that have been conjured up to create new segments and to attract new buyers. Everything from full-blown SUVs to their smaller derivatives are eating into the pie of what was traditionally the domain of the sedan.

But it's not like sedans have thrown in the towel either. The classic shape is coming back in vogue, now that our roads are clogged with all manner of crossovers, and cashing in on the trend is the Volkswagen Virtus. There's no mistaking the silhouette for anything other than a stately 'car', and to gain insights on what makes sedans such as the Virtus so beautiful, we have a tête-à-tête with Sudhir Sharma, a renowned designer who is no stranger to automobile design.

To provide some context, 40 years ago, when cars were still considered a luxury, Sudhir was pursuing a postgraduate degree at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad. Incidentally, he happened to start his design company, IndiDesign, in Pune, which is a hub of major automotive manufacturers. Sudhir recalls those days and says, "What I learnt from the industry people, is that I must travel to the Frankfurt Motor Show, very early." He recalls, "All the brands were there, and they didn't just present the car to you, they presented the full philosophy behind that car. They even presented the full design process behind the car to you." Sudhir's expertise in working with automotive manufacturers also led him to meet up with 'Bossman' Adil Jal Darukhanawala, and Sudhir has been on award juries for automotive magazines on multiple occasions. Clearly, Sudhir is an authority on car design, and when we pulled up to his residence on the outskirts of Pune, the veteran designer's eyes lit up at the sight of the Virtus GT. The wild cherry red paint made the sedan a head-turner, even in a garage that did not lack for luxury cars.

Glancing at the silhouette of our Virtus, Sudhir comments, "Sedans have always meant a complete car. It means an engine is at the front and there's a place in the back for luggage and there's room which I have in the centre. Suddenly with hatchbacks and SUVs, because the engine is up front and I'm in the middle, there's no space for the luggage!" Sedans have been a mainstay of Volkswagen's model lineup, be it with their mass-market offerings such as the Vento or their more upmarket offerings such as the Jetta and Passat, and the Virtus continues to follow in their footsteps, with quintessentially Volkswagen design language.

"One thing which comes across extremely positively is that these are no-nonsense cars. They are very clear about the purpose with which they are building the car and they stick to that. They're not trying to entice you into thinking they are something that they're not. Very functional, very reliable, and trustworthy engineering is what comes across. You can see how they have translated that over to the design

GT
MH14KJ2874

Right: Sudhir Sharma (R) offers his insights on the Virtus. **Below:** Instrument cluster gets red theme on the Virtus GT and is easy-to-read. **Bottom:** Cherry red accents inside and wireless Apple CarPlay

> **“THE DESIGN IS MINIMALIST IN THAT SENSE, BUT VERY TO-THE-POINT. THAT ACTUALLY ADDS HUGE VALUE TO A PERSON”**

by looking at the kind of curvatures and straight lines used. Look at the nose of any Volkswagen car for example, there are no unnecessary extra lines there.” Moving on towards the side of the Virtus, Sudhir proceeds to look at the shoulder line and adds, “Whatever lines are there, they are not unnecessarily thinner or thicker. It’s just right. The design is minimalist in that sense but very to-the-point. That actually adds huge value to a person who is spending a lot of money,” Sudhir proceeds to points out.

Design is personal but it is hard to deny the handsome proportions of the Virtus. There are visible cues inspired from earlier Volkswagens, in particular, the Jetta, yet the Virtus looks and feels a lot more contemporary and youthful. The design is not overboard with chrome, the lines are timeless, and Sudhir proceeds to comment, “The Virtus is a very tight, beautiful, aesthetic and proportionate form. That’s the first thing that strikes you. Then you look at this and you say this couldn’t have been two years earlier. It’s a very modern form in that sense.”

Left, top to bottom: New Volkswagen roundel looks cleaner and classier; sunroof is a lovely feature to have; the design carries visual cues from other Volkswagens. The taillamp for instance, is a dead-ringer of the Jetta's

This feeling is only enhanced by the visual elements that are unique to the GT Line variant that you see here. The GT Line is only available with the 1.5 TSI engine and it looks very sporty, especially in the red shade that you see here, contrasting with the 16-inch alloy wheels which are finished in black. The roof is all-black too, giving the Virtus an aura of aggression as well. Closer inspection will reveal that the Virtus actually rides higher than a conventional sedan, with its mid-size SUV-like ground clearance for the lack of a better word. But the added practicality that the increased ground clearance offers does not mar the silhouette of the Virtus in any way. "The higher ground clearance has been well-integrated," adds our design expert, and judging by the way that Sudhir has been checking out the Virtus, the sedan certainly seems to have won him over from the outside.

Sudhir is also the publisher and editor-in-chief of DesignIndia Magazine, and while his short commute to work isn't too much of a hassle, Sudhir being primarily self-driven means that he places a greater emphasis on the functionality of the interior, not just the form factor. The two-tone dashboard of the Virtus is a fairly quick study even if you have not driven a Volkswagen for the first time, and Sudhir comments from behind the ’wheel, “When I was driving it, nothing felt like it was out of place. It's all there. It's very well laid out.” The Virtus GT also gets body coloured accents on the dashboard, and while they add to the liveliness of the cabin, the youthful touches have not been overdone. The black leather upholstery with red contrast stitching adds to the premiumness of the Virtus, and if you're worried about how these seats would fare in our Indian conditions, fret not, because the Virtus also gets seat coolers. The sedan body style also translates to more room and comfort at the back, and when you consider nifty features such as ambient lighting, a digital cockpit and a responsive touchscreen with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, it feels a lot more expensive.

Sudhir explains that integration of form and function in a vehicle is often the greatest challenge for a designer. “In a car, I am in an environment which is safe, secure, known, pleasurable and hygienic as well as healthy. It is a bubble in which you travel from one place to another. How secure and safe you can make that bubble, how affordable you can make it, is what makes it good.” Another factor that carries more relevance with the sheer number of new car models is desirability. “For a lot of people a car is not internal. They don't understand what the car is, but they understand the impact their car has on another person. It announces ‘you’, tells where you stand in life. Vehicle design starts with that. It needs to be desirable, having aspirational value for the person who buys it. But then it needs to keep them safe and secure and move very well. The functional part, absolutely no compromise on that. So it needs to be safe, secure, all that. On top of that, the design part should be desirable. Many times when we say this car is sexy, what we mean is that it's a car which you desire, you want to have, you want to get into.”

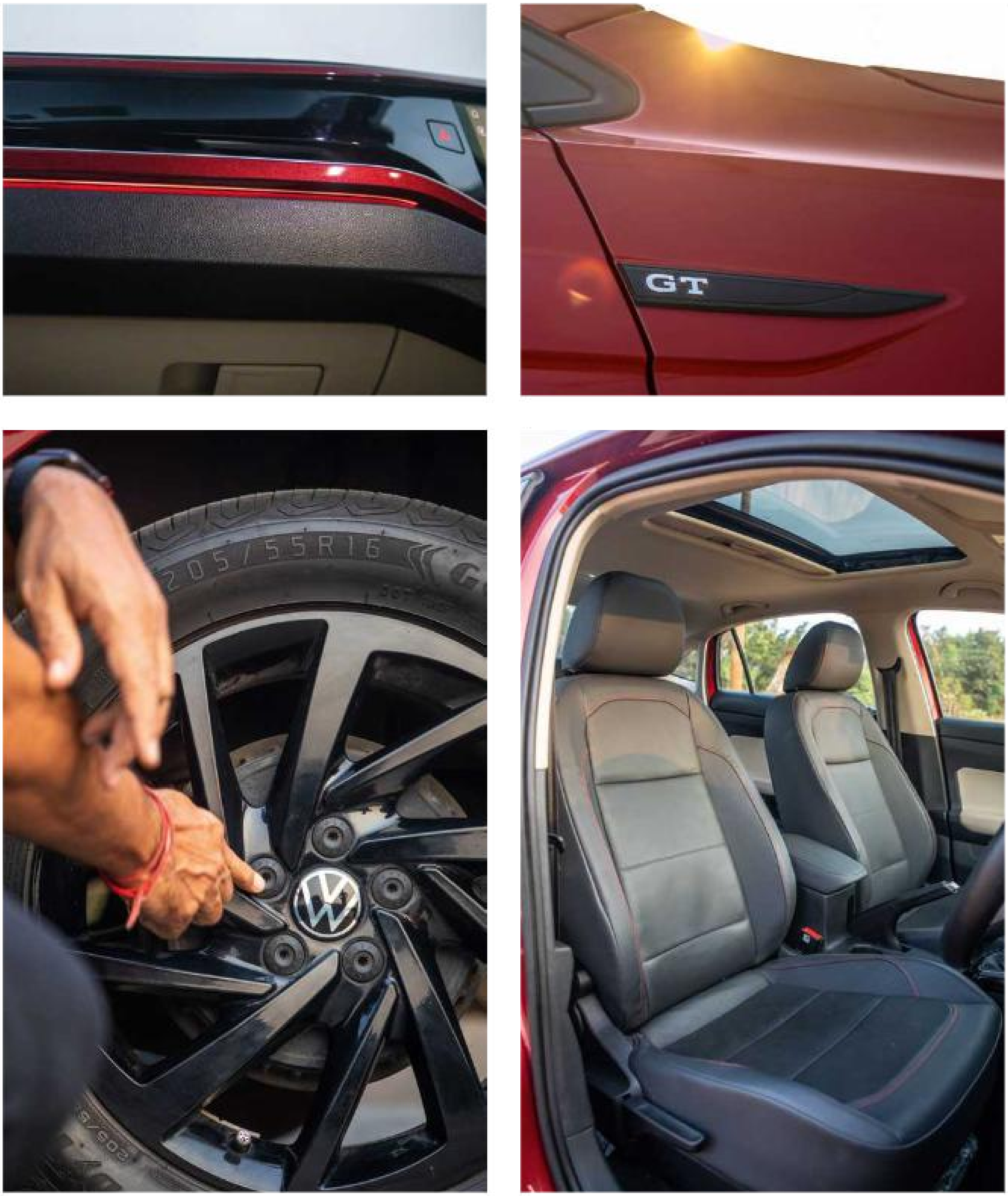
“THE ADDED PRACTICALITY THAT THE INCREASED GROUND CLEARANCE OFFERS DOES NOT MAR THE SILHOUETTE OF THE VIRTUS IN ANY WAY”

But what about the cars of tomorrow? With an increasing number of EVs pushing the design envelope, would the design of cars change fundamentally from what we know it to be? Sudhir's answer is an eye-opener. "I think it would be wrong to get attached to the shape of a car. Shapes are dictated by technology, not just fuel. As long as cars keep the desirability factor, when you look at one and you have the capability to fall in love with the car, it will work." Pointing out our common fondness for a classic sedan shape such as the Virtus', Sudhir adds, "It just so happens that in a certain age group, we've grown up with the idea that 'this' is a car. So when you see that back on the road you feel good about it. You say, that is how a car is supposed to be. It's all nostalgia. But it's not the nostalgia of seeing an old car. When you see an old car, it's a different kind of nostalgia. What you like is that a modern sedan, such as the Virtus, is building on your memories. It's a car with a taste of yesteryear, but it's a futuristic car. That will always stay, as long as you have a car which is relevant in terms of technology, functionality and desirability. Sedans will always have a place. I don't think they will ever go away."

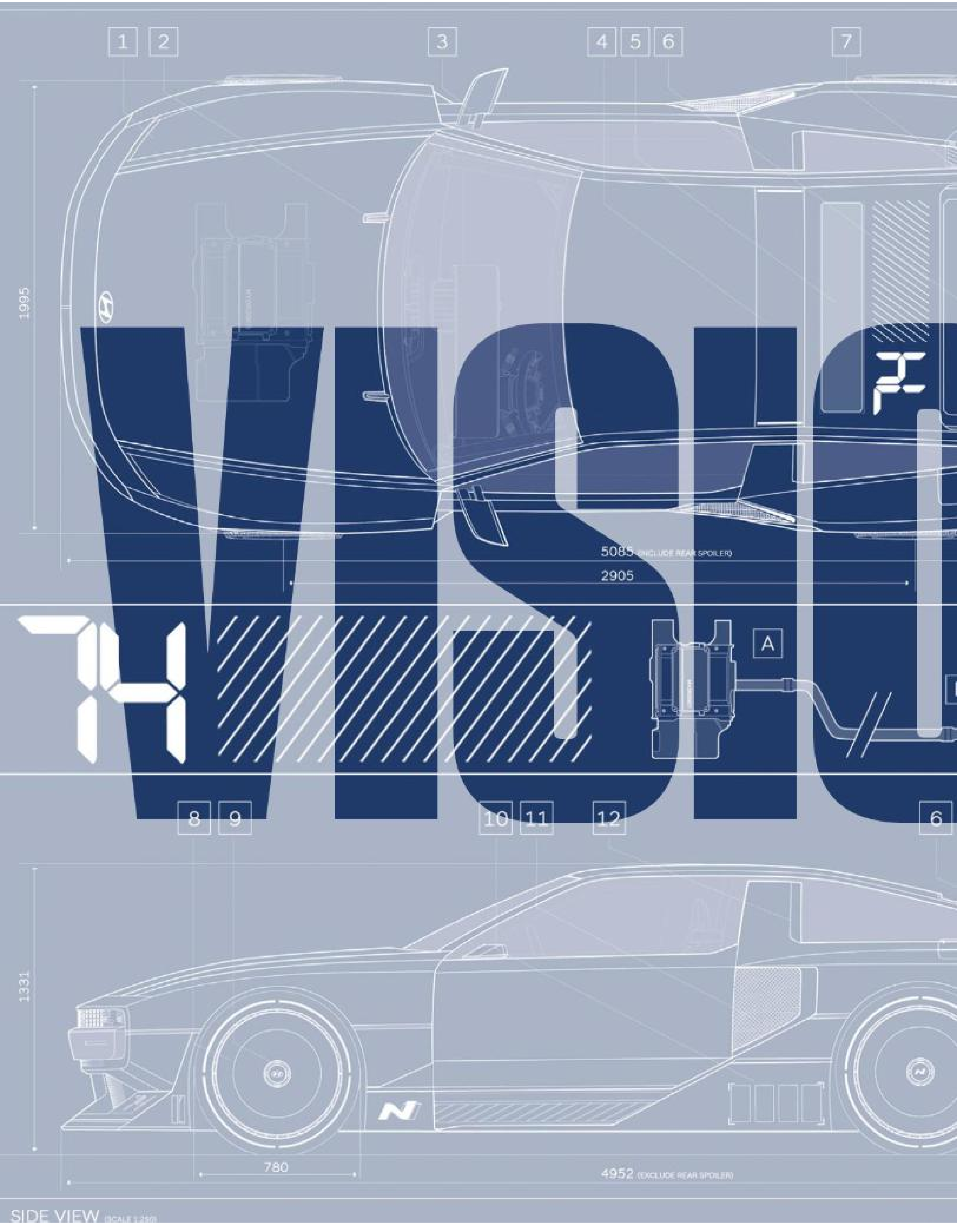
At this point I find myself looking back at the Virtus longingly. All my life, I wanted to drive a timeless sedan that was a sign of having made it in life. Of having grown up. And after driving around in SUVs, I warm up to the styling of a sedan even further. It's partly the rose-tinted nostalgia that makes me feel so, but it's also the fact that the Virtus is a beautiful looking machine that warms the heart without compromising on any front. There might be more outlandish looking machines coming our way soon, but I like to believe that the Virtus and its sedan silhouette might just become a modern classic for the future. And despite the fierce competition today, the Virtus continues to remain a style star.

> **"A MODERN SEDAN, SUCH AS THE VIRTUS, IS BUILDING ON YOUR MEMORIES. IT'S A CAR WITH A TASTE OF YESTERYEAR BUT IT'S A FUTURISTIC CAR"**

MH14KJ2874
VIRTUS
GT



Clockwise from top right: GT Line on the Virtus gets several variant-specific touches, including black leather upholstery for the seats, 16-inch alloy wheels finished in black, along with red ambient lighting and cherry red accents in the cabin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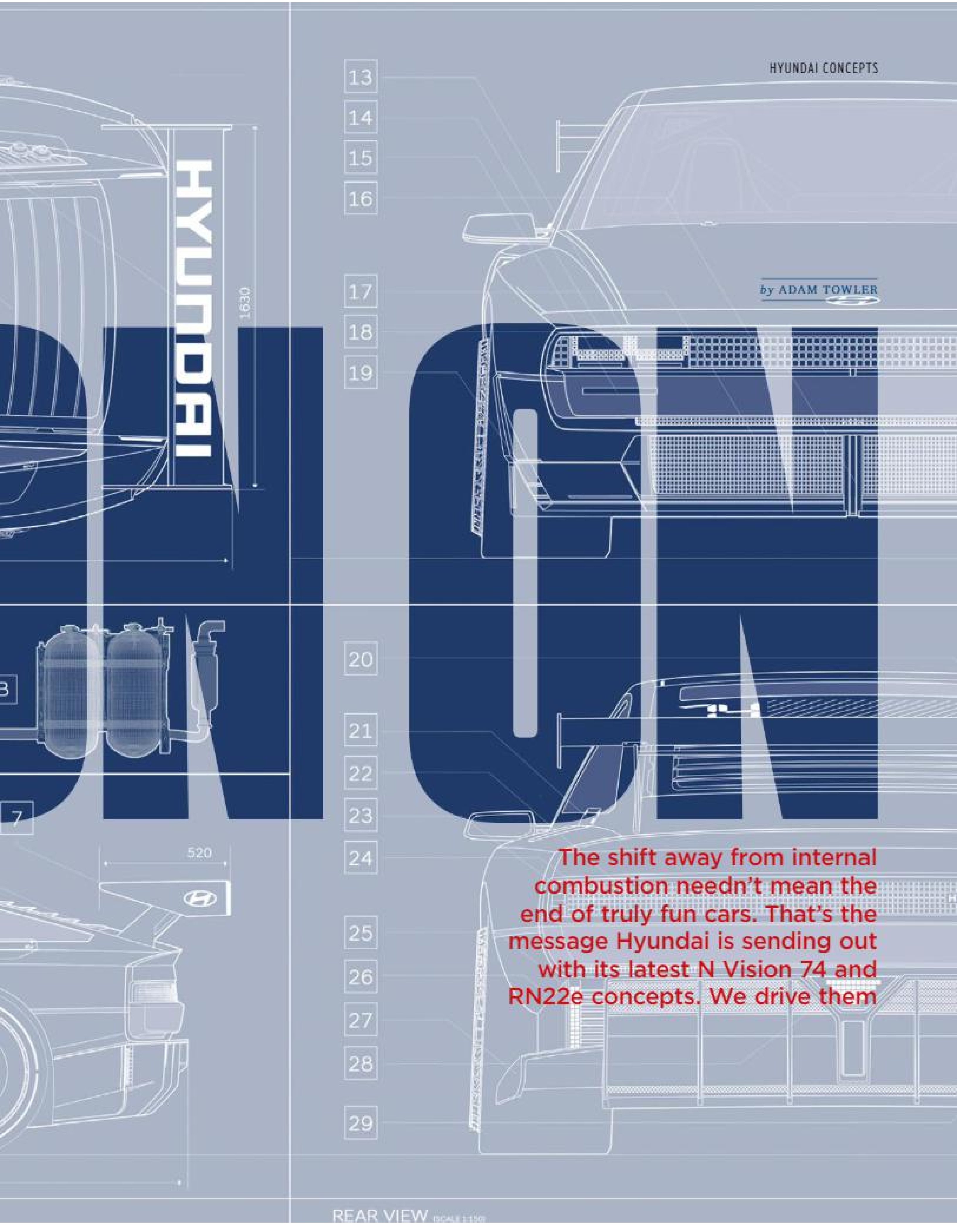
SIDE VIEW (SCALE 1:250)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REAR VIEW (SCALE 1:150)

ON ON

by ADAM TOWLER

The shift away from internal combustion needn't mean the end of truly fun cars. That's the message Hyundai is sending out with its latest N Vision 74 and RN22e concepts. We drive them

THE DRIFT GOES ON AND ON, AND IT'S NOT like anything I've felt before. Time seems to have slowed down, so I have more than enough of the commodity to ponder what ICE car could do something like this. Maybe one of those wild professional drift cars: a 3-series Compact with an S85 V10 from an old M5, and a rear diff set up purely for the task of drifting; something that could snap fully sideways purely under power in a fast, gentle curve, then stay there while the rears are bonfiring almost for eternity. Like this N Vision 74 just has.

What makes this all the more surreal is that there's no screaming V10, or ludicrously boosted straight-six for that matter, audible in the cockpit, but rather the sound of a hair dryer and very little else. A hair dryer? Read on…

evo has come to the Bilster Berg circuit in Germany to drive both the Hyundai N Vision 74 and its slightly less spectacular but no less important brother, the RN22e. And before you turn the page in disgust at the thought of reading about two concept cars with electric motors, may I suggest you don't, because what's contained within them, and the spirit in which they've been created, is very pertinent to our branch of motoring indeed.

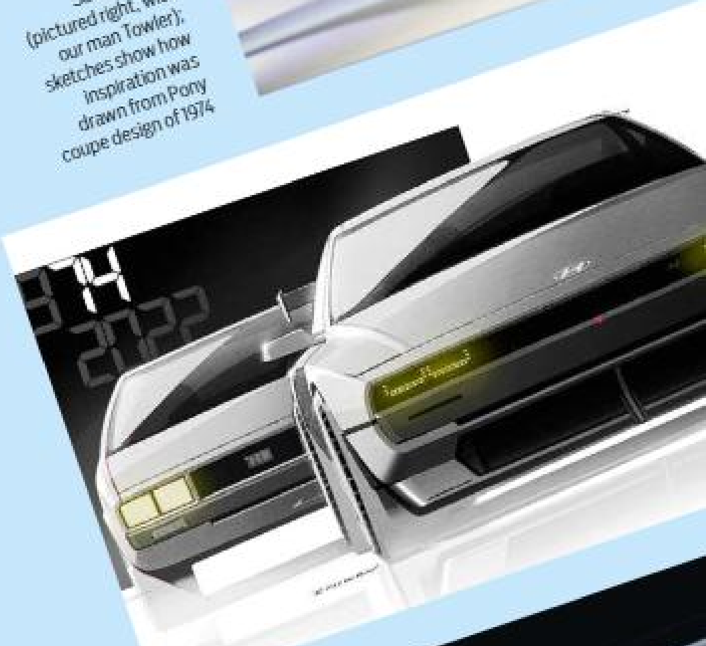
The N Vision 74 is the crazy-looking retro coupe that I'm told nearly broke the internet when it was released, and has subsequently put its maker under huge — but surely welcome — pressure to make something that looks vaguely like it. But more on that car in a moment, because first it's the turn of the slightly more conventional RN22e — or Rolling lab, N, 2022, electric — the latest in a sequence of prototypes that have trialled EV powertrains in N form. This one is based on the very distinctive body of the forthcoming Hyundai Ioniq 6 electric saloon, which like the Ioniq 5 is built upon the company's latest 800V E-GMP platform and features motors on the front and rear axles (making it the first 4WD N car), producing 215bhp and 362bhp respectively for a combined power output of 577bhp, backed up by 740Nm of torque, all from a 77.4kWh battery.

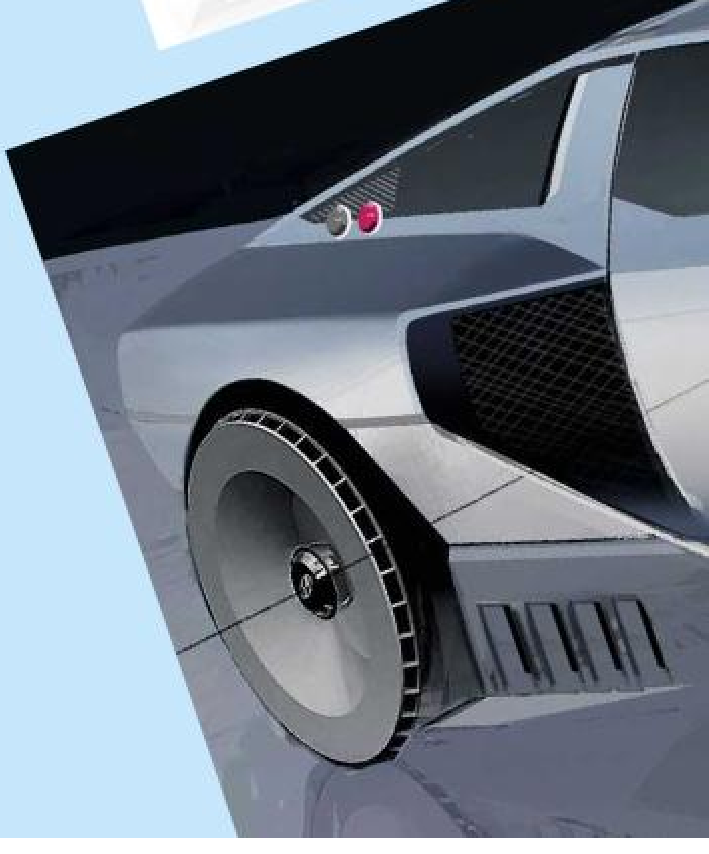
Those are big numbers, if not necessarily by EV standards, but a bigger reason why you should care about this concept is that it shares that drivetrain with next year's Ioniq 5 N, which is set to be the world's first true EV hot hatch. It includes a new twin-clutch type of rear differential, known as eTVTC, so chosen because it enables an immediacy of response that is ideal when faced with an electric motor's fierce and instant torque delivery.

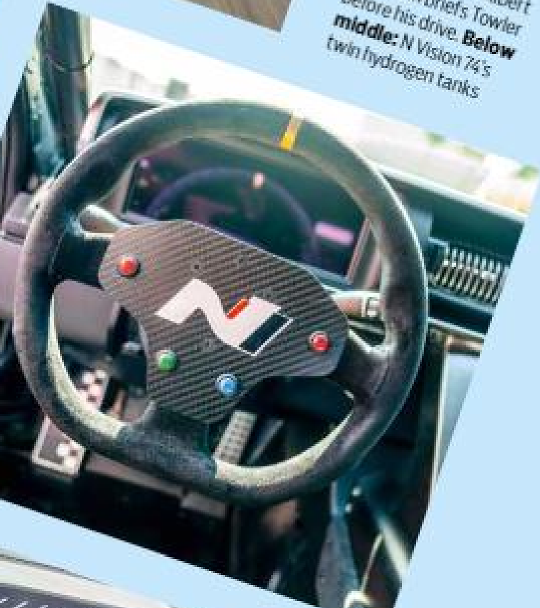
The RN22e goes further, however. Think of it as a kind of EV touring car racer: it certainly looks the part, and it will indeed take over Hyundai's entry into the ETCR, making it the first dedicated-platform EV racer in the championship (Hyundai currently uses an i30 N TCR with an electric powertrain fitted). It is also a development mule for a couple of more creative technologies instigated in part by Albert Biermann, the man behind the creation of Hyundai's N department but now semi-retired and retained as a consultant. Biermann is a passionate believer that manufacturers are going to need to be imaginative when it comes to retaining their cars' driver appeal in the face of electrification, and that simply big performance and stop and go pedals are not enough to create a true enthusiast car.

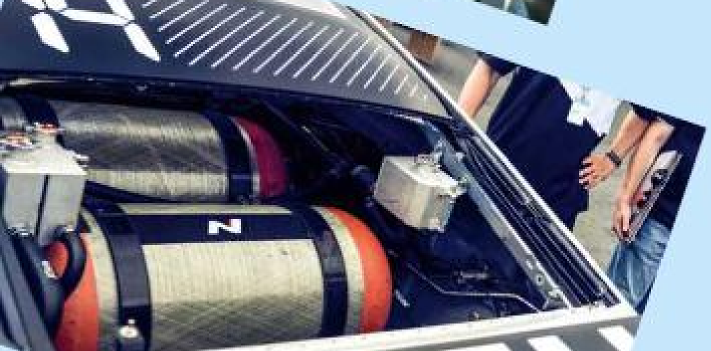
To that end he's taken the artificial noise programme Hyundai was developing and applied it to the concept, complete with vibrations inside the car, to inject some sense of character into what could all too easily be seen as white goods. It's hard to pinpoint exactly what it sounds like, but it really does make a cyber-muscle-car noise, inside and out, even from a distance. It's more effective than it, er, sounds, if you'll excuse the pun.

Right and below: N Vision 74 was styled by Hyundai head of design SangYup Lee (pictured right, with our man Towler); sketches show how inspiration was drawn from Pony coupe design of 1974









Left and below: The N Vision 74 (in silver) and RN22e (blue) in action. **Top left:** Albert Biermann briefs Towler before his drive. **Below middle:** N Vision 74's twin hydrogen tanks

The other technology is N e-shift, which is an entirely virtual gearshift aimed at boosting driver involvement. In effect, the ultimate power of the motors is held back slightly, and then interrupted momentarily when the driver clicks the paddle behind the wheel, before the full power is brought in with a bump to mimic the next 'gear' meshing. The car is slightly slower with the tech switched on, but I'm told it's worth it. Only one way to find out...

Despite weighing two tons the RN22e is impressive on the circuit. The acceleration stings, and it's surprisingly deft into and out of corners, doing a good job of disguising its weight and even indulging in some power oversteer on the exit. The engineers have done a lot of work on guaranteeing the cooling of the powertrain, and are confident that this would be an EV that you could genuinely take on a trackday, helped by the fact that on the right charger it can go from 10 to 80 per cent charged in just 18 minutes.

As for the virtual shifts, they feel like a promising idea that still requires more development. It reminds me of the old SMG II 'box in an E46 M3 (single-clutch automated) in that on upshifts there's a noticeable pause before the next gear drops in — the nodding dog effect. Then on downchanges it seems to wait for an unnecessarily long time before the computer will allow a shift. Still, it does give the brain more to think about, which is entirely the point.

On to the N Vision 74, and it's not difficult to be swept up by the emotive backstory to the car. The inspiration comes from Hyundai's very first homegrown car, the Pony of 1974. This was styled by the legendary Giorgetto Giugiaro of Italdesign, and alongside his saloon was another design for a coupe variant. The emergent manufacturer didn't have the resources to bring the coupe to life, however, but something similar did eventually appear in the form of the DeLorean DMC-12, also the work of Giugiaro.

Think of *Back to the Future* and now look at the N Vision 74... It's not hard to see where the inspiration has come from. When it drives past it is genuinely jaw-dropping, and what's on the inside doesn't disappoint either, because this prototype uses Hyundai's latest hydrogen fuel cell technology, effectively mixing the fuel cell stack, a battery and an electric motor to suit the prevailing traffic and driving style. There are no set rules, but think EV for urban, cell for cruising, and EV boosting the cell's output for ultimate performance. The 114bhp stack is mounted at the front, the T-shaped 62.4kWh battery in the middle, and at the rear there are two 2.1kg hydrogen tanks and two electric motors driving the rear wheels only. Total power output is 670bhp and torque 898Nm, and while it's no lightweight at around two tonnes, the N Vision 74 reaches 100kmph from rest in under 4 seconds, exceeds 250kmph and has a range of over 600km.

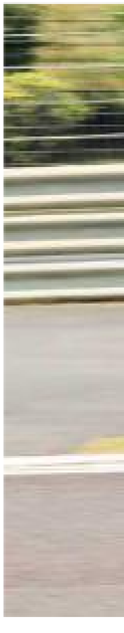
Driving it is fascinating. The aforementioned hair-dryer sound is air being pumped over the stack, and the view through the shallow angle of the windscreen is suitably exotic. It feels big, wide and low, with an initial amount of body roll just enough to let you know where you are with it. The weight bias is like a 911's, and you can feel it with some loads through the chassis. The 74 is, obviously, very quick, but the real fireworks are in drift mode, because with torque vectoring on the rear axle thanks to a motor per wheel, the car can do things that feel both completely alien and utterly hilarious at the same time. It's a hooligan-like but joyous way to experience a cutting edge piece of technology that may just be in our futures.

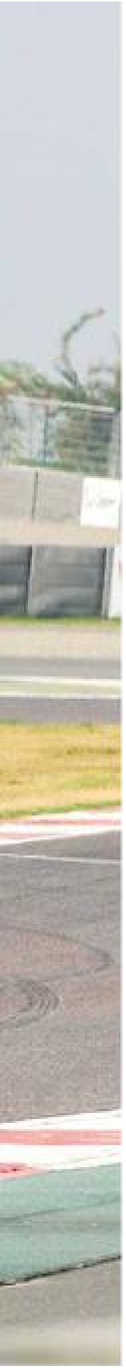
And that's the point, really. Precious few other companies are meeting the demands of a sustainable future yet still trying to keep the thrill of driving alive like Hyundai is. The N department has had a very quick rise to prominence and created some of our favourite cars of recent years. These two concepts suggest it will be at the forefront of our motoring enjoyment in the years ahead. ☒

by ROHIT NALAWADE PHOTOGRAPHY *by* AUDI INDIA

V-MAX WEEKEND!

We drive hard and fast on track with the Audi Experience Performance Weekend and sample their finest sports cars and SUVs at full throttle





267KMPH. THAT WAS THE TOP SPEED THAT an RS 5 Sportback managed to clock at the NATRAX high speed track the month I started interning at this magazine. Getting a ringside seat for such a drive was something I had never even dreamt of. Fast forward a year into the gig, I drove at the Buddh International Circuit for the first time, in an EV sadly, a cardinal sin for a petrolhead. Then an invitation for the Audi Experience Performance Weekend came along. Fast cars, powered by good ol' fashioned internal combustion at the BIC? I was overjoyed!

The Audi Experience Performance Weekend is the carmaker's way of showcasing the true capabilities of its performance car lineup to its customers. The spread was impressive — from the S5 to the RS 5 Sportback and a pair of RS Q8s. In the background, a fleet of e-tron Sportbacks and SUVs were also present for a handling experience set up off the main track.

Nevertheless, the main act for me had to be the chance to put in hot laps in the RS cars. Instinctively I headed for the RS 5 Sportback, sadly not the green one that we had driven at the Temple of Speed but an electric blue one. I didn't have a lot of time to familiarise myself with my first Audi (talk about trial by fire), so I quickly settled in and muttered a prayer as I drove onto the track. We took it easy on the sighting lap, giving me time to find the quickest line around the 5.3-kilometre track, but even that seemed awfully short.

As I approached the main straight for my first ever flying lap of the BIC, I buried the gas pedal into the carpet and the 444bhp delivered from the 2.9-litre V6 pinned me back into the seat. There's a relentless surge of power and the grip on offer, thanks to quattro, means that you can coax high speeds from the RS 5 with relative ease. On the back straight, I concentrated even harder. 200, 220, 230… I saw 243kmph on the clocks before slamming on the brakes, which shed speed without any drama and it was onto the twisty section where your lines play a greater role rather than sheer speed. Later on, we headed out in the hairy-chested German hot-rod that was the RS Q8 and proceeded to forget everything one might know about a car's dynamics. This is basically an Urus in German clothes, and the way that its 592 horses goes around corners truly belies its size. The RS 5's a scalpel, the RS Q8 is more of a hammer, and I did have a fair workout hustling it at full pelt. And it sounds the part too, with the lovely V8 baritone in RS mode enveloping all your senses like nothing else. The only time the RS Q8 feels its size is when slamming onto the the anchors, the brakes working overtime to bring this sports car on stilts to a stop. Having made it back to the pits however, I couldn't have asked for a more thrilling weekend, spent at V-MAX in Audi's finest. Now if I had only gotten a go in that green RS 5… ⊠

Clockwise from top: RS Q8 has a serious turn of speed; wish you could hear those exhausts; the writer hustles an RS 5. **Facing page:** Chicanes dealt with ease, thanks to quattro

MH14JR3796

200, 220, 230… I SAW 243KMPH ON THE CLOCKS BEFORE SLAMMING ON THE BRAKES

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PLUS

- **ULTRAVIOLETTE F77** INDIA'S FASTEST ELECTRIC BIKE LAUNCHED
- **MATTER ELECTRIC** THE ONLY EV TWO-WHEELER IN INDIA WITH A MANUAL 'BOX

116
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INDIA BIKE WEEK
#COMEHOME
PETRONAS Sprinta

ELECTRIC MATTERS

Matter Energy, an EV startup in Gujarat has taken the wraps off of its first two-wheeler. While we don't have a name for the bike yet, the company has spilled some interesting details on the new bike. This bike, once launched will be the first in segment to come with a liquid-cooled battery pack and motor. This has been engineered to ensure optimum temperatures and none of the risks usually involved with EVs overheating. The next interesting bit is that this motor also comes mated to a four-speed manual sequential gearbox which is operated by a clutch that the user engages with a traditional lever at the 'bars. The liquid-cooled battery is 5kWh in capacity and it powers a 14bhp motor which generates a colossal 520Nm of torque. In terms of range, Matter is claiming that this bike will be able to run between 125-150km on a single charge and that you should be able to charge it with a typical 5A socket making it more accessible for everyone. Design wise, the bike looks sharp and has styling cues from the likes of the Yamaha MT-07 and even bikes such as the TVS Apache and the Hero Xtreme. In terms of launch and availability, we should get more information in the coming months.

Is that a gear lever on an EV?

WORDS: KARAN RAMGOPAL

ELECTRIFIED THRILLER

Ultraviolette has finally taken the wraps off the production version of the F77, its ambitious electric two-wheeler. This in fact, is the first performance-oriented electric motorcycle in the country. There are significant updates in the production bike compared to the prototype we sampled in 2019, majorly a fixed battery pack instead of the plane loading bay style three swappable units on the prototype. The battery pack in the top-end 'Recon' variant has a capacity of 10.3kWh making it the largest battery pack on an electric two-wheeler in India. The power outputs of this 'Recon' variant stand at 38.8bhp and 95Nm of torque. The base 'Original' variant gets a slightly smaller 7.1kWh battery with a 36.2bhp motor which is good for 85Nm of torque. The bigger battery on the Recon results in a 307km claimed IDC range while the Original is rated for 207km. There's also the limited 77 unit run edition variant which gets a bit more oomph, in terms of its outputs but that won't make much of a difference for you or me considering they are already sold out. The styling of the bike remains very close to the prototypes and retains the jet fighter design language. The battery and motor are mounted in a steel trellis frame which hangs off of 41mm USDs up front and a preload adjustable monoshock at the rear. The Recon and the limited edition also benefit from preload adjustability in the forks. Now let's talk about more important numbers. ₹3.8 lakh is what you pay for the base variant of the F77 and ₹4.55 lakh is what you'll be shelling out for the Recon variant (both prices ex-showroom). Those who got their hands on the limited edition will be paying ₹5.55 lakh. So the Ultraviolette F77 is the biggest, fastest and also the most expensive electric two-wheeler in the country. This is one EV we can't wait to ride.

ULTRAVIOLETTE
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THE GRID OF NEWS

A round-up of this month's automotive news

LIME GREEN SAMURAI

■ Kawasaki has launched the 2023 Ninja 650 in India and prices start at ₹7.12 lakh which is ₹17,000 more than the model it replaces. For the extra moolah you're getting Kawasaki's traction control system with two modes as found on the Versys 650. The TC system can also be turned off, should you choose to do so. Apart from that the bike stays mechanically unchanged and is powered by the same 649cc parallel-twin mill that churns out the same power and torque figures.

MUSCLE STANCE

■ Suzuki has updated its maxi scooter the Burgman with some much needed tweaks which make it look more proportionate and less like Johnny Bravo. Confused? I'm talking about the fact that the scooter now gets a bigger and wider rear tyre. A 12-inch wheel shod in 100/80-12 rubber. The rest of the scooter is unchanged and is powered by the same 124cc mill that puts out 8.4bhp and 10Nm of torque. At ₹1.12 lakh ex-showroom, you're paying roughly ₹19,000 more than the standard Ride Connect variant of the Burgman.

PAINTJOB

■ Royal Enfield has added three new colours for you to choose from when picking up the Himalayan 411. Named Glacier Blue, Dune Brown and Sleet Black, Royal Enfield says that these colours are inspired from the colours that you are likely to see in the high-altitude regions of the Himalayas. Apart from the new shades, you also get a USB charger as standard kit. At ₹2.22 lakh for the brown and ₹2.23 lakh for the blue and black, you're paying roughly ₹6,000-7,000 extra for the colours and the USB port.

BULLPUPPED

■ TVS has launched the Apache RTR 160 4V Special Edition with a new colourway but the changes are more than cosmetic. This new edition comes in a new pearl white colour scheme which adds nice contrast to the red seen on the tank, seat and the rear wheel. Apart from that it also gets a new 'bullpup' exhaust which has been inspired by its namesake gun. This exhaust is a kilo lighter and less weight is always a good thing. You also get adjustable levers as standard kit on this variant. Want one? Sign a cheque for ₹1.3 lakh.

MINI CLASSIC

■ Royal Enfield has revived the Classic 500, in a manner of speaking. At the 2022 Rider Mania, the company showcased a 1:3 scale model of the bike that is extremely detailed and weighs 8.5kg. Most of the parts you see, you can interact with and will function as it would on the real deal. Things like the clutch and brake levers, the front and rear suspension, wheels and kickstarter. This limited edition was priced at ₹67,990 and is already sold out within days of its unveil. This or the real deal then?

BABY PULSAR

■ Shortly after launching the Pulsar N160, Bajaj has introduced the Pulsar P150, the third bike to get the new-gen styling. Powering the bike is a 150cc single-cylinder mill which puts out 14bhp and 13.5Nm. The bike gets a cradle frame chassis which uses the engine as a stressed member. Suspension duties are handled by a telescopic setup at the front and in a first for the 150 lineup, a monoshock at the rear. There are two variants, one that gets a rear disc while the other gets a rear drum. Prices are ₹1.16 lakh and ₹1.2 lakh, respectively.

Rishad Cooper

As the sun gradually sets on a glorious century of internal combustion bikes, a new modern classic bike era is slowly emerging in India. Rishad talks about the joys of owning a classic bike

Motoring journalists have it good most days. Spanking new exotic superbikes, a track day excursion, off-road and touring rides are all just a phone call away. Putting new bikes through their paces before they reach the market is part of 'the job'. And that's not all, for you can even pick which long term test bike you want to add to your garage.

After a few years at it, experiencing state-of-the-art tech bikes becomes a new normal. That innate eagerness to ride the steady flow of great new bikes seldom fails to excite. Yet, there's still a certain unmatched thrill reserved for greying middle aged bikers, who suddenly see, hear and smell the bikes they rode decades ago. More so, when you suddenly realise these bikes have today gained the stature of indelible, historic bikes on the Indian biking scene.

Bajaj displayed the original Pulsar 150 at a recently held riding experience event for their latest gen Pulsar. The original shall someday surely qualify as a sought after classic, but for now, the famous Japanese factory Yamaha's got the modern classic bike base covered like no other here. Enter the bad boy RX 100, once again! Having owned two in the '90s, I know few things stir deeper emotions, than the sound of these two-stroke screamers. Ride it sedately, and the RX 100 fools you into believing it dons only a thoroughly refined gentleman's hat. Crack open the throttle however, and haah, hats and socks are all blown to the weeds, for there's a fire belching beast within. The RX makes just 11 odd bhp, but it's feather light at just over a 100 kilos and injects an adrenalin rush that punches far above its weight. Top speed is no more than 110kmph, but back in the day, this was ample, to keep you ahead of almost anything on an Indian highway. Better still is the frantic ability this little Yamaha has to blast aggressively to this top speed. Yes, cornering, ride quality and braking could all improve, but that's today. For the RX 100 sat right at the top of its game throughout its production run in the late eighties and early nineties.

Even reliability was tops. Though today, RX reliability can't hold a candle to good modern day commuter bikes. For many of its parts required frequent replacement, failed or wore out pretty fast. The indicator rubbers had a tendency to fracture. Likewise, clutch and brake cable failure was common, as were issues with the fuel gauge, the basic switchgear and speedometer. Not to mention the electrical wiring system, suspension seals and bushes and even wheel bearings all giving trouble with time, regular oil pipe replacement, exhaust decarbonisation and even regular wheel spoke failures.

Still, if you've got your eyes open for them, you won't miss an increasing tribe of these ever popular Yamahas once again shining on Indian roads, many in surprisingly good condition for their age. Enquiries at your local spare parts market will tell you most spares are still available.

No matter where the RX goes, people still stop and stare. And resale values have also consistently been heading north, with perfect condition RX 100s today selling at around ₹1.5 lakh. Which makes good value for a modern classic that's still roadworthy and a respectable showpiece. Above all, the RX 100 makes a real life time-machine for guys and gals, who grew up blasting around town on these little two-stroke legends.

The Yamaha RX 100 is a bona fide legend

The Pulsar 150 is a classic in the making

@rishadcooper

Vijay Parmar

With a bad neck and shoulder, Vijay Parmar heads to Spain to get certified as an instructor for BMW Motorrad India. What better way to unwind than to attend the IBW in Goa and enjoy some delectable cuisine? Or so he thought!

INDIA BIKE WEEK

BMW Motorrad India put my name forward. The International Instructors Academy accepted, and I was informed that I should present myself to TWTMoto in Spain in November for the certification course. I sent my passport for a visa and one look at my photo, the embassy decided that there was no way that I posed a threat as a potential illegal immigrant, and granted me the visa. I have an honest face, but I doubt it has launched even a single dugout canoe, let alone a thousand ships!

Let's roll back a little. In August, while training the GS Trophy finalists from India for their gruelling test by fire, I felt a soreness in my neck and shoulder that I attributed to age. I was right. Age had caught up. The 6th and 7th cervical vertebrae had developed a bulge and this joyous event was heralded by the start of what would be torture for the next three months.

Pain radiating into my right arm — day and night, as the bulging vert played havoc with its host — me. The MRI showed that this was not anything to be worried about but the continuous pain belied the diagnosis.

To cut a long story short, I continued to Spain, spent the regulation seven days in pain, and was unable to complete one part of the course. My performance was below par, well below par, and the fact that I couldn't lift my right elbow at all during the turns meant I couldn't turn any better than a broken winged avian! It was a disaster. Stuff I regularly taught hundreds of students effortlessly, had suddenly become a gargantuan task for the trainer.

There was learning. Never go into battle half prepared, and definitely do not try to hunt a lion with a toothpick! If you are not a 100 per cent, the result will never be a 100 per cent.

Wait. Repair. Regroup. And then go to war.

Hopefully that last part will be tackled in Thailand in a few months. Once the repair is complete.

Coming back from Spain I spied two 'Golden Tickets' on my desk, for the IBW in Goa. I needed a break and although the last thing I wanted to see was another large bore motorcycle, I picked up the phone and called a friend. He needed no second invitation and the Go Air jet that carried us to Goa had a list throughout the flight that the Captain could not right.

Yes he is a large man, this friend of mine.

We went through the regulation exchanging of the Golden Tickets for wrist bands, signed indemnities, unaccompanied by our photographs, so completely useless for identification purposes, in case we keeled over from an overdose of burgers and beer! The bands need an RFID/ barcode identifier that connects to a database if scanned. So that the guy who fell flat on his face from sunstroke can be rolled over, his wrist band scanned, and the details of the relevant emergency contact would appear miraculously and immediately. The necklace is complete.

We need to connect the last mile. Not just have the dots but also to connect them.

Proceeding to Fat Fish, a seafood restaurant that opened in 2016, when it served up authentic tasting seafood. Sadly it has fallen victim to the endless barrage of North Indian tourists and their flavour dead palates. The squid rings or calamari were served up on a bed of tomato puree and boiled for so long that the only use for them would be as rubber bands, binding large wads of currency notes!

Disappointing in the extreme. Bye bye, Fat Fish.

'Gunpowder' — the fiery South Indian restaurant that has moved from Hauz Khas village to North Goa. And it hit the spot. *Appam*, Kerala beef curry, with potato *ishtew*, was heavenly. Followed by *payasam*, it was a complete meal. That we had to pull a few strings, including telling the owner, in a Delhi voice, that we knew the owner and he had confirmed that we could 'just go there and take his name'.

He was so taken aback at this blatant lie that he cocked his head at the maitre d'hotel and we were respectfully ushered to a 'good table'. Once installed, with a menu in our hands, the said gent came and properly introduced himself as the owner.

Such wonderful manners.

Finally our homestay. A wonderfully restored Portuguese bungalow that will relax your soul and recharge your batteries in three days flat. The Capella Forest Retreat — or simply paradise. Not by the sea or the beach but tucked away just enough inland. Home to Elsa the Dog and two lethargic cats. One of whom is a blood relative to Garfield. Noise free, save for two days when IBW wannabes roar past on straight pipes that are pandemonium — some with original Akras, an audible joy.

The world is spinning out of control. Enjoy the carousel ride.

Enough said.

@ttmountainman

BIKING NIRVANA

#COMEHOME
INDIA BIKE WEEK

One of the many reveals at the IBW

Team Fast Bikes India rode down to the IBW on these bikes!

WORDS: MANDAR SAWANT | IMAGES: AVDHOOT A KOLHE

India Bike Week returned to its home in Goa after a three-year hiatus and didn't fail to put on a good show for all the two-wheeler fanatics who showed up. We joined in on the action!

Good food and great music. IBW never disappoints

The Auto Engina Himalayan 822

Brad Binder's RC16 MotoGP bike got a lot of attention!

KTM, please bring the 890 Adventure to India

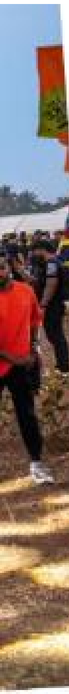
A few vintage beauties were present too

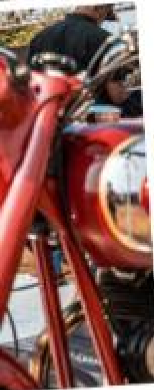
Throwing up some dirt at the mud track

Riding down to Goa for India Bike Week has always been at the very top of my wishlist. Started in 2013, it is not only the country's, but also Asia's largest motorcycle festival. A gathering of the finest machines from around India, with good food, great music and some new metal on display, it's a weekend that bikers love. This year was going to be extra special, as the IBW returned to Goa, on December 2-3, after a three-year hiatus. Back to where it all started in 2013, then. The event was last held here in 2019 and was postponed due to the pandemic in 2020. Not that it has been missing from the calendar entirely — the 2021 edition took place in Lonavala. But hey, Lonavala is not Goa is it?

Team Fast Bikes India rode to the 2022 IBW with four bikes: the Royal Enfield Hunter 350, TVS Ronin, TVS Apache RR 310 BTO and our shutterbug Avdhoot's Hero XPulse 2V. We arrived a day early and were treated to the symphony of bike exhausts ripping across the coastal state, a teaser of what lay ahead.

The IBW began with the customary bike parade after which the fest was open to the public with many launches planned over





the two-day span. The first bomb was dropped at the KTM stall. On display was Brad Binder's KTM RC16 MotoGP bike and the Rally 450 Dakar bike. Grabbing as much attention was the 1290 Super Duke R and the 890 Adventure R, as the latter is highly anticipated for an Indian debut. The second bike that grabbed many eyeballs was the Kawasaki KLX 150BF.

The Biker's Mart, powered by **evo India**, was one of the main hubs of activity. It had a variety of stalls that were selling stickers, riding gear, goods, and all kinds of motorcycle memorabilia. There was a display for vintage bikes as well.

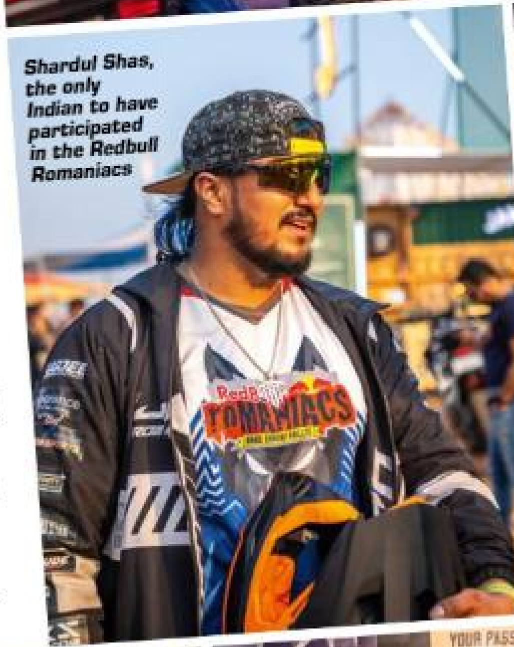
Auto Engina, a Pune-based custom motorcycle maker unveiled its latest creation, the world's first twin-cylinder Royal Enfield Himalayan, dubbed the Himalayan 822. It gets bodywork by Autologue Design and 15 units are planned for production. BMW Motorrad also showcased the 2022 S 1000 RR, its flagship superbike that has received better aero and more power than before!

This year, the IBW also hosted races for professional riders on five dirt tracks, and instructors taught novice riders the ropes of off-road riding. The event also featured a meat festival, amazing performances by artists such as King, and a brand-new BMW G310 RR that was given away by the event's official sponsor, Petronas.

With a diverse range of motorcycles on display, and exhausts shrieking to their full glory the 2022 IBW continued to carry on the fandom that the earlier editions had garnered. The bikers had returned 'home' and celebrated this wonderful lifestyle, the lifestyle of the Thrill of Riding!

MOTORRAD GARAGE

The BMW Motorrad booth was a popular one



Shardul Shas, the only Indian to have participated in the Redbull Romaniacs

N.G.C
CHOPPERS
GOA INDIA

Trust me, they were very soft spoken

Jumps on a motocross bike are the ultimate bliss

CLICK TO WATCH THE YOUTUBE VIDEO evo

YOUR PASSION HAS A DESTINATION
RIDE
RACE
PARTY
INDIA BIKE WEEK

The men who made IBW possible

The KTM 450 Rally was a showstopper!

WORDS: KARAN RAMGOPAL | IMAGES: AVDHOOT A KOLHE

BIKING FAMILY

In its 2022 iteration, the Royal Enfield Rider Mania is back in Goa and is bigger than ever

Enter the Moto Verse!

Some really interesting talks happened here

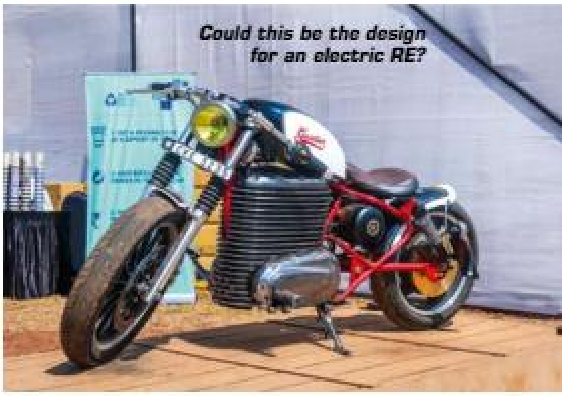
If you own a Royal Enfield and it is more than just a tool for getting from point A to point B, you would definitely be aware of the great migration to Goa for two days of absolute motoring bliss for the Rider Mania festival. Now a certain virus that shares its name with a beer I particularly enjoy decided to play spoilsport and put a temporary hold on the festival for two years. But the year is 2022, the virus is on the wane, RE was back in Goa for the Rider Mania and this was its biggest one yet.

Kicking things off was the India unveil of the Super Meteor 650 which was first showcased in Milan at the 2022 EICMA show. We got a chance to see the bike in person and get an idea of what RE's next potential bestseller is like. Now riding to Goa on your thumper is a very small part of this festival for bikers. You have live music, great food and beverages, talks by various industry experts, motorsport-based activities, showcases of cool custom and vintage bikes and the list goes on.

The riding activities in the 2022 RM involved a hill climb event, a flat track school and the dirt track race. These allowed riders to truly explore the art of riding off road and even compete for prizes. I participated in the media race at the Dirt

Sit here, relax and enjoy some good tunes!

Adrian Sellers and Aspi Bhathena talk racing!



Could this be the design for an electric RE?

That's not a real bike, it's a 1:3 scale model

Want some fresh beer, I mean gear?

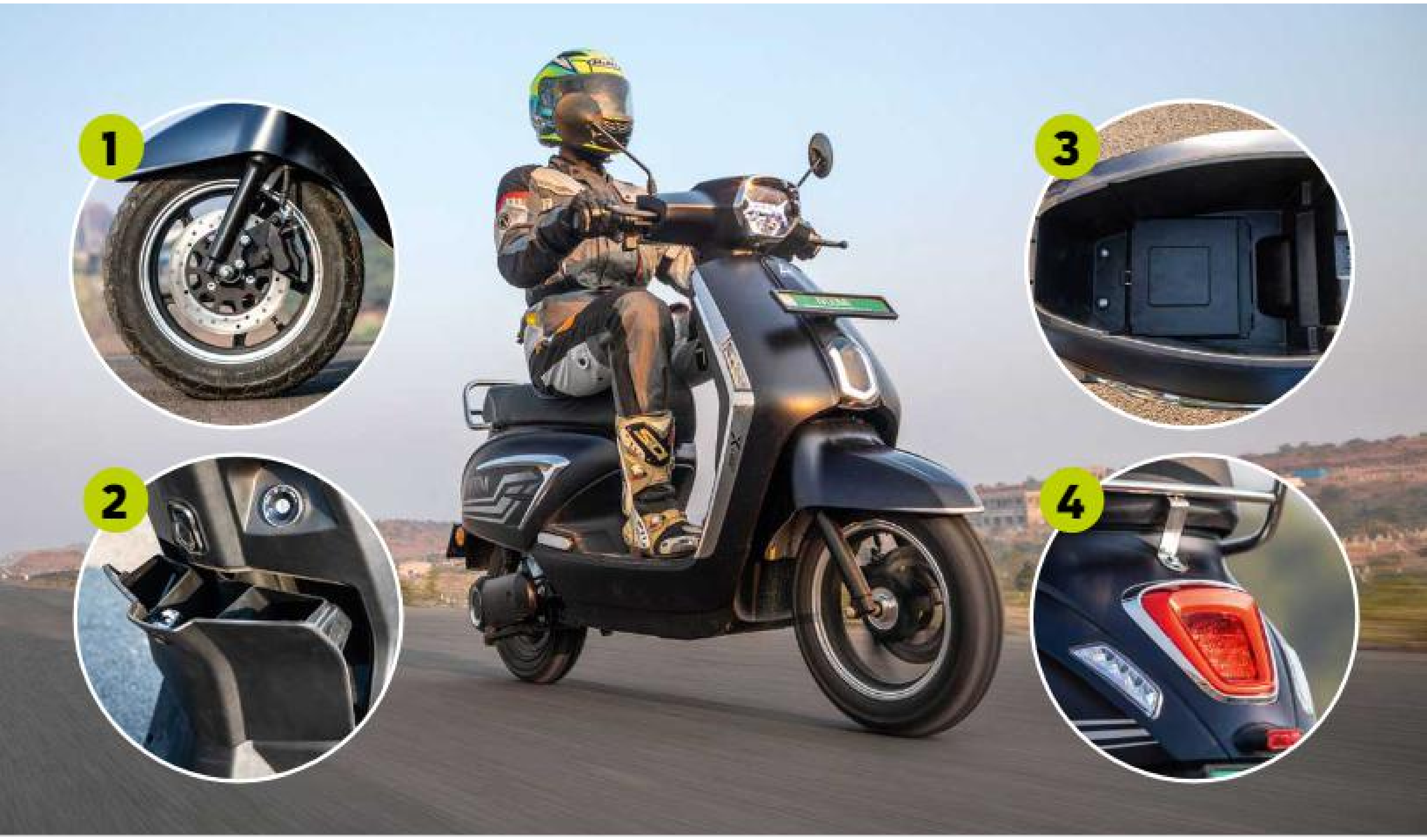
RE's official customs at the Moto Reel

Track arena and finished second after kicking up a lot of dust and even taking a little tumble. But that's all part and parcel of riding off-road and this setup was a great way of showcasing just that in a safe and controlled manner.

In terms of showcases, there was the Moto Reel area which was dedicated to showcasing some of the most radical and tastefully done custom bikes, some made by the RE custom department under the leadership of Adrian Sellers and some by enthusiasts and custom shops across the country. There were also talks given by people influential in the world of motoring. Aspi Bhathena, fellow journalist and the only Indian to have raced at the Isle of Man, gave a very insightful talk about the Continental GT cup, a one make championship that he is running along with Royal Enfield. This was just one of the many interesting talks you could attend.

Apart from this, you could also interact with a horde of like-minded enthusiasts and just unwind and take a break from the mundane routine of life all while enjoying some delicious food and live music. You really do get a sense of the community that Royal Enfield has dedicatedly and painstakingly created over the years and you don't realise when the two days just fly by. Words and stories don't do justice to Rider Mania, though. It has to be experienced. So next year, pack those saddlebags and join this great migration!

> “RIDING TO GOA ON YOUR THUMPER IS A VERY SMALL PART OF THIS FESTIVAL FOR BIKERS”



1: Front disc brake provides adequate stopping power. **2:** Cubbyhole is convenient. **3:** Space for a second battery. **4:** Retro styling all around

Quick ride

Retro EV

Can the iVoomi Jeet X be a good alternative to a mid-premium ICE scooter?

Words: Karan Ramgopal | **Photography:** Avdhoot A Kolhe

THE LAST FEW YEARS HAVE seen a lot of electric two-wheeler brands popping up in the Indian market. iVoomi is one and the Jeet X is their flagship, at ₹99,999 ex-showroom. In terms of style, the Jeet X is a pretty good looking scooter, with the Vespa SXL being the clear muse.

Upon closer inspection though, it becomes immediately apparent that fit and finish levels haven't been achieved at the same level. Inconsistent panel gaps are aplenty and the plastics also feel sub par. The handlebar grips are also hard to the touch, revealing this scooter has been built to a cost. The riding position is better when compared to other local EVs but it still feels like a compromise when you ride the scooter and feel just how high the floorboard has been placed.

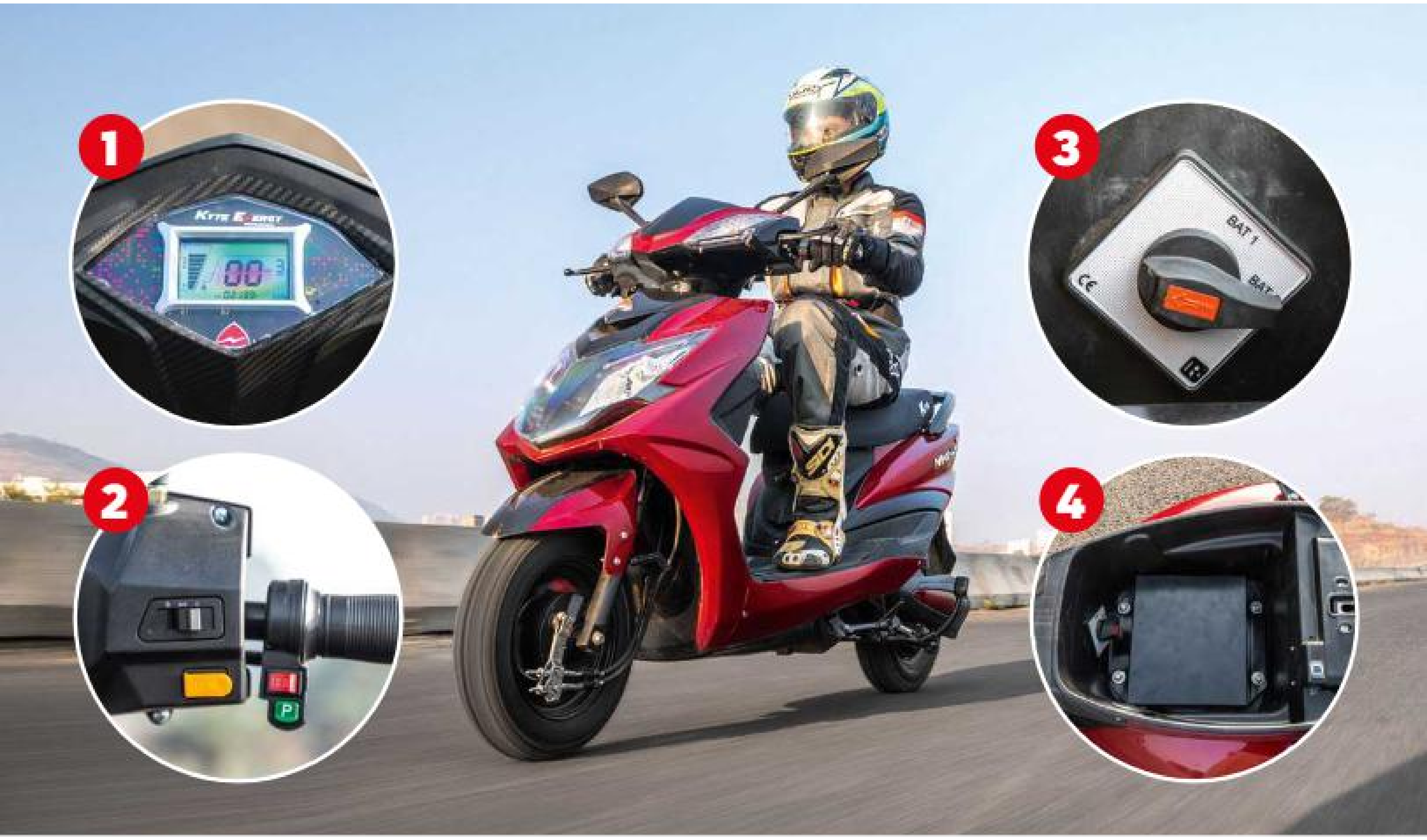
Moving on to how the Jeet X rides. The suspension is set on the firm side and it doesn't damp out potholes as well as required. This ends in harsh ride quality that means you don't want to be spending much time in the Jeet X's saddle, in comfort. Dynamically, the scooter does handle a bit better than other 'budget' EVs we have tested, and this could be down to the fact that it runs 12-inch wheels. However, the Jeet X is a bit top-heavy and you need to be wary of that at slower riding speeds. Coming back to build quality, our test scooter also emitted a prominent rattle when going over speed breakers, which was rather worrying. Braking comes courtesy of a front disc and rear drum which offers adequate stopping power.

Powering the Jeet X is a 1.8kW motor, which peaks at 2.5kW and runs mated to a 2kWh battery. iVoomi claims 90km to a full charge and you could double that by adding a second battery. The scooter however does feel a touch too underpowered and throttle calibration is inconsistent, at best. In terms of feel, there isn't much differentiating the three ride modes, barring the fact that the speeds are capped in each mode.

For the ₹1 lakh odd you pay after registration, the iVoomi Jeet X feels heavily overpriced. It's a scooter we find hard to recommend, and this boils down to the fact that it could be so much better built and also, you get the far more accomplished TVS iQube for the same amount of money, a scooter that is simply leagues ahead, on all fronts.

Specifications

Motor	Hub-mounted permanent magnet
Battery	2kWh
Power	2.4bhp (constant), 3.3bhp (peak)
Torque	NA
Range	90km (claimed)
Price	₹99,999 (ex-showroom)



1: Digital instrument cluster displays the basics. **2:** Switchgear including ride mode and park button. **3:** Battery toggle switch. **4:** Underseat storage space

Quick ride

Kyte Energy Magnum Pro

The Magnum Pro brings in the alluring promise of long range, yet also has some serious flaws

Words: Mandar Sawant | **Photography:** Avdhoot A Kolhe

BORN IN 2017, KYTE ENERGY has the entry level e-scooter segment in its crosshairs. The Magnum Pro is the Nashik-based firm's latest model, that targets the youth. It has aggressive design language, a large apron-mounted LED headlight, angular mirrors that offer good rear view and a triangular LED taillight. The Magnum Pro does grab a few eyeballs, and its digital speedometer also displays trip, battery voltage and range. The unit although small, is legible even on the brightest of days. A conveniently large cubby hole integrated into the front apron offers good storage space. However, fit-finish is mediocre, to say the least, with many exposed screw heads, lacklustre switchgear and flimsy feeling body panels. The Magnum Pro gets a single-piece seat, with cushioning that's a touch too soft, making riding the scooter for prolonged periods uncomfortable. The riding position is awkward, with a low seat height and high floor pan. The rider could do with a little more room too. And you feel this most when turning at low speeds, because the handlebars end up uncomfortably close to your knees.

Powering the Magnum Pro are two Lithium-ion batteries, with a capacity of 3.2kWh. These feed power to a hub-mounted BLDC electric motor that outputs 2.4kW (3.2bhp). The battery packs are removable and can be switched via a toggle housed under the seat. Kyte Energy claims the Magnum Pro will do 160km on a single charge. We pushed the scooter hard during its test, and were able to eke out 70km without coming to the second battery. So expect real world range of up to 140km on both batteries.

The Magnum Pro has three ride modes that limit top speed to 41, 52 and 62kmph. Power delivery feels similar in all three modes, with the throttle delivering choppy power delivery. There's a combi-brake system, relying on drum brakes, that feel far from reassuring. The system lacks bite and progression and often fails to effectively slow the scooter. The Magnum Pro rides fairly well on bad roads, at lower speeds, but handling feels iffy around bends.

At ₹80,999, the Magnum Pro is amongst the more expensive scooters in its class. Yes, it offers good range but its many serious shortcomings, including poor build quality, ergonomics and handling make this a scooter that's hard for us to recommend. ☒

Specification

Motor	Hub-mounted BLDC
Transmission	NA
Power	3.2bhp
Torque	NA
Range	160km (claimed)
Price	₹80,999 (ex-showroom)

TVS Racing DIARIES

uma racing
16
17
4
14

WORDS: MANDAR SAWANT | IMAGES: TVS RACING

LIVING IT UP

Witnessing a tense championship race and then riding the very bike those racers ride? I've just had my dream come true!

I've ridden a race-spec motorcycle on a MotoGP track. Few people can make such a statement! Since enrolling in the 2022 TVS Young Media Racer Program and placing second in the championship, I have been bitten by the track riding bug, and belting it out on a MotoGP circuit has been my wildest dream ever since. To be completely honest, I had never even considered doing it before and never did I expect that dream would turn into reality so quickly.

I turned 23 on November 2, 2022, and that very evening, the Ed sent me the invitation to this riding experience. I was among a limited group of motor noters that TVS had invited to the Chang International Circuit in Thailand to watch the last race of the Asia One Make Championship. But the icing on the cake was that following the race, I would also get to ride the OMC-spec RR 310 race bike on the track! Whoa, what!

At the Asia Road Racing Championship earlier this year, TVS made history by becoming the first Indian manufacturer to ever launch a One Make Championship on a global level. The tricolour was represented by Jagan Kumar, K Y Ahamed and Deepak Ravikumar. But it was Thai chap, Vorapong Malahuan who came out on top and won the first-ever TVS Asia One Make Championship. Ahead of the final race, he already had a 126-point lead courtesy six podiums and two wins.

Vorapong continued to be the fastest in the practice session, followed by K Y Ahamed and another Thai racer Watcharin Tubtimon. In Race 1 of the final round, Watcharin was chasing Vorapong frantically as he swiftly took the lead. But by the final lap, Vorapong was 3 seconds clear of the competition. And that was enough to earn him P1 and the inaugural Asia One Make Championship crown.

The second race started on a similar note with Vorapong charging ahead of the troop at the start. But by the end of the second lap, Japanese rider Fugo Tanaka made his move to P1. Vorapong seemed to have changed his mind at that point since he gently pulled away to P7. Considering his significant victory yesterday as the overall champion, he had nothing to lose. But at the conclusion of the sixth lap, Vorapong

2
TVS
RR
Racing

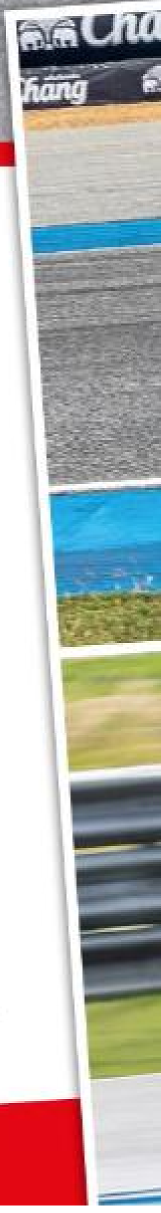
showed off his talent by moving up to P2. Insane. In the seventh lap, Vorapong passed Fugo to bag P1 and stayed there until the end, dashing towards victory once again.

Because TVS had granted us VIP access to the pits, watching these men compete on the track was an experience to remember. I stood right next to the finish line, behind the fence, and watched the race alongside the crew, getting a glimpse of how fast these motorcycles actually are as they zoomed by. The OMC-spec Apache RR 310 is a single-cylinder motorcycle, so I was genuinely taken aback by how loud it was each time the engine sent a lovely symphony echoing through the grandstand walls.

Come D-Day and before I could head out onto the track, B Selvaraj, team principal of

Chang INTERNATIONAL CIRCUIT
1
2
3

Vimal Sumbly handing over the trophy to Vorapong



> “IT'S ONE THING TO HEAR THIS BIKE RIDE PAST YOU, BUT TOTALLY ANOTHER THING HEARING IT AT FULL CHAT FROM THE SADDLE”

TVS Racing schooled all of us with all the technical know-how of the motorcycle. Based on the Apache RR 310, this is the most advanced bike TVS makes and that shows, literally. First of all the aerodynamics, this motorcycle looks nothing like its road-going counterpart. It gets a full carbonfibre body including the fairing and tail section. The result? An ultra light 110kg kerb weight with fuel, which further drops down by 10kg, if the carbonfibre wheels are slapped on. Staggering. The motorcycle breathes through ram air induction and gets a twin exhaust setup. It deploys the same 312cc oil-cooled engine, but with beefier internals. Titanium valves, forged pistons and better

The pros are on a different level altogether!

Knee-downs make you slower but are a lot of fun!

Fully tucked in on the main straight

cooling management which give it a 38 per cent power hike. It makes nearly 50bhp now. More bespoke stuff includes a fully-adjustable ARRC-spec Ohlins suspension and a Racer ECU which cleverly adjusts itself with respect to engine conditions to give optimum performance.

The bike also gets launch control, a quickshifter and a bigger 320mm disc brake at the front. This full project was executed in just six months and that is very commendable to say the least. Selvaraj also told us that 95 per cent of the bike is made from parts supplied by Indian companies.

Finally, the moment I had been waiting for, it was time to head out. The clip-on handlebars and footpegs were set up as per my liking and I hurriedly stuffed myself into the race suit. I swung my leg over the number 2 bike and fired it up. It came to life with a loud roar and started idling at 3000rpm, transferring all the vibrations through my arms giving me goosebumps for ages. The paddock stand was removed and off I went. Right off the starter blocks, the bike astonished me with how light it felt. Even lighter than my long-term TVS Radeon, which is almost 10kg heavier. The short throttle was responsive even with the lightest of inputs and the power delivery was so linear. As soon as I came out of the pits, I gassed it sparing no time, to experience the rev range. This motorcycle has an 11,900rpm redline and it pulls hard right up to it every time. But the most impressive thing was the brakes. I've never felt such strong stopping power before. The lever feel is absolutely spot on and just the right amount of progressive. There's next to no fade, even after heavy usage. After all, this has to be a supreme system, because the racers clock over 200kmph on the main straight at Chang. In fact, the very same weekend K Y Ahamed broke the top speed record of the OMC-spec RR 310, topping out at 211.2kmph and becoming the fastest Indian motorcycle. Impressive for a race bike, but mind blowing for a bike of this class. I managed to push myself to 185kmph which was an occasion in itself.

The bike was shod on Dunlop slicks and those provided immense grip. Surprisingly I got comfortable on the bike very quickly, despite its radical riding posture. What took some time to get used to was the GP-style gear shifting though. The one-up five-down style gear shift pattern, which is the opposite of what's usually present on road bikes. It's one thing to hear this bike ride past you, but a totally another thing experiencing it at full chat from the saddle. This ride experience is something that I will definitely cherish for the rest of my life.

All smiles after an exhilarating track session

K Y Ahamed showed me around Chang

TVS has been racing since 1982. The brand has brought performance to the masses in India with its sporty motorcycles and even commuters. Its entry into the Asia Road Racing Championship has not only given Indians but also many Asian riders a chance to step up to international racing and that is nothing but a matter of pride for Indian motorsport.

by TRAYAMBAK CHAKRAVARTY

PHOTOGRAPHY *by* INDIAN RACING LEAGUE

Well begun, half done

The first-ever Indian Racing League got off to a rough start, but was spectacular once racing resumed

THE INDIAN RACING LEAGUE started out as one part of the greatest revolution that Indian motorsports would see. Planned to be a support series to the Formula Regional Indian Championship and Formula 4 India, the festival would be unmissable for motorsport fans in the country. However, due to innumerable reasons, the Formula series had to be postponed and then cancelled while the IRL soldiered on. Even then, things were hard. The first round at the newly inaugurated Hyderabad Street Circuit was a non-starter, as a crash during practice brought out safety concerns, considering the series uses the same Wolf GB08 Thunder cars with KTM bike engines. "There was an incident during the practice session with one car, and as a matter of abundant precaution and advice from FMSCI stewards and FMSCI along with the RPPL technical team, we have postponed the races to further investigate the incident," said the organisers.

Despite this, the resilient series continued on to Chennai at the Madras Motor Race Track, where changing weather conditions and a grid full of talented drivers resulted in a spectacular sight. With international drivers of great repute such as Le Mans legend Neel Jani, W Series drivers Bianca Bustamante and Fabienne Wohlwend and European Le Mans series champion Oliver Webb among others, as well as the cream of Indian racers including Ruhaan Alva, Akhil Rabindra, Shahan Ali Mohsin and more.

THE RESILIENT SERIES CONTINUED ON TO CHENNAI AT THE MADRAS MOTOR RACE TRACK

The Indian Racing League runs a unique race format. There are three races in a round, including two sprint races and a feature race. For both sprints, drivers qualify for their teammates who will race, while in the feature race, both drivers compete by way of a mandatory driver change. Neel Jani and Akhil Rabindra dominated the first two races for the Hyderabad Blackbirds, while it

was Godspeed Kochi's Alister Yoong, son of former F1 driver Alex Yoong, who was on the top step of the podium in the third race, winning from pole position. Shahan Ali Mohsin won the fourth race for Speed Demons Delhi while the Hyderabad Blackbirds duo continued their rout at the final race in Chennai. Akash Gowda, Nikhil Bohra and Bianca Bustamante impressed too with their speed at the races, helping their teammates score pole positions and fastest laps. Going into the final two races at Hyderabad, Hyderabad Blackbirds leads the championship with 206.5 points, with Godspeed Kochi following in a distant second with 161.5 points. The racing has been tremendous and we look forward to more at the final race in Hyderabad, which will take place at the time of printing.

Top left: Bianca Bustamante was a standout with her podiums. **Above:** The podium at Chennai. **Bottom:** The first season of IRL had a strong grid

While the Indian Racing League has been a much greater success than its predecessor the X1 League ever was, there is still a long way to go. With the same Hyderabad Street Circuit hosting a huge international event such as Formula E in just two months' time in February, the IRL was expected to act as a proof of concept. However, although the race cancellation left a bad taste in the mouth, it has surely given the organisers much experience in how to handle one of the toughest things in motorsports — making a street race happen. Meanwhile, unlike the Jurassic age Formula cars that X1 used, the IRL uses state-of-the-art Wolf chassis with KTM 390cc bike engines that have proven to be a hit with fans as well as drivers, who commend the spectacle of the cars as well as the immense drivability. The changing conditions at Chennai also gave us a glimpse of these cars running in wet conditions, which was a treat especially for fans of motorsport photography.

The franchise format has worked well for most leagues in India, having been pioneered by the IPL. Using city-based teams, the Indian Racing League hopes to achieve what few other racing series have in the world — create a racing series purely for its own entertainment, not a feeder series or as a demonstration of technology. This idea can go a long way if the IRL organisers manage to learn from the testing first season, and will surely bode well for Indian motorsport as a whole. ☒

by TRAYAMBAK CHAKRAVARTY

PHOTOGRAPHY *by* ANAND PHILLAR

Karna's suit of armor

Karna Kadur secures the 2022 Indian National Rally Championship with a thunderous win at Bengaluru for Round 3 of the 2022 INRC

KARNA KADUR AND CO-DRIVER Nikhil Pai overcame mechanical troubles to win the Karnataka 1000 rally and with it, sealed the 2022 INRC championship as well. With this, Kadur became INRC champion for the second time, after winning it first in 2016. He encountered car damage on the final day of the rally as his sump guard got damaged by a hit from a rock. However, the Arka Motorsports team repaired his Volkswagen Polo in just 20 minutes to send him back out again. That was the only threat to Kadur's comfortable lead that he took on day 1. The win was slightly anticlimactic as his closest championship rival, Gaurav Gill, had to retire his Mahindra XUV300 Rally in the first stage due to driveshaft issues. Both Gill and Kadur had taken one win each prior to the K1000 rally, and both had also suffered technical and mechanical issues in the previous two rounds.

The win was emotional for Kadur not only for the championship. "A pretty emotional moment. My dad (late Prakash Kadur) never won a K-1000 Rally and so, I am first in the family." He was followed by Mandovi Racing's Aroor Arjun Rao and co-driver Satish Rajagopal over a second adrift in second place.

In INRC 2, Privateers Suhem Kabeer and co-driver Jeeva Rathinam reigned supreme while Kadur's Arka Motorsports teammate Philippos Matthai and co-driver K N Harish won the INRC 3 category with a third-place finish overall. Pragathi Gowda impressed again with a win in the women's category along with co-driver Trishna Alonkar. SNAP Racing's Arnav Singh Pratap, with co-driver Arjun SSB, were the top Junior INRC finishers. The final round 4 of the 2022 INRC Season will take place at Kohima for the inaugural Rally of Nagaland, from January 12 to 14. ☒

THE TEAM REPAIRED HIS VOLKSWAGEN POLO IN JUST 20 MINUTES

Clockwise from top: Karna Kadur and Nikhil Pai on their way to victory; kicking up dust in Bengaluru; on the victory lane with the championship complete

evo Fleet

Audi Q7 55 TFSI

Three months with the big Audi leaves us wanting for more

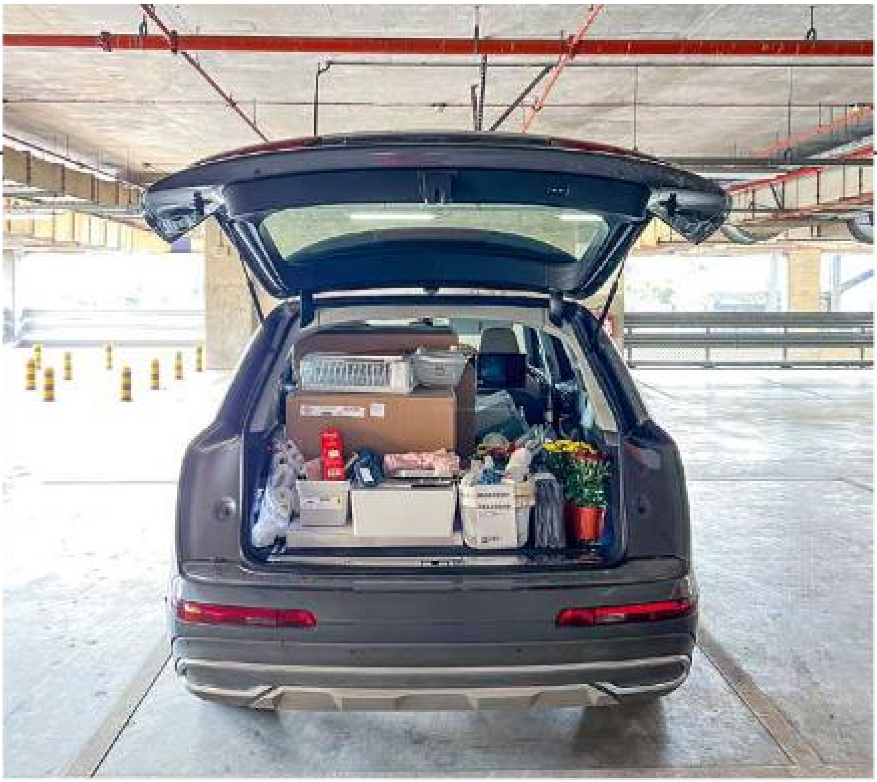
THIS IS NOT THE KIND OF CAR I expected to spend a significant chunk of time in. A big V6 petrol, turbocharged at that, is not usually one you use as both a daily driver and a support car on shoots. Yet, after I overcame the initial shock of filling 85 litres of petrol, YOLO took over.

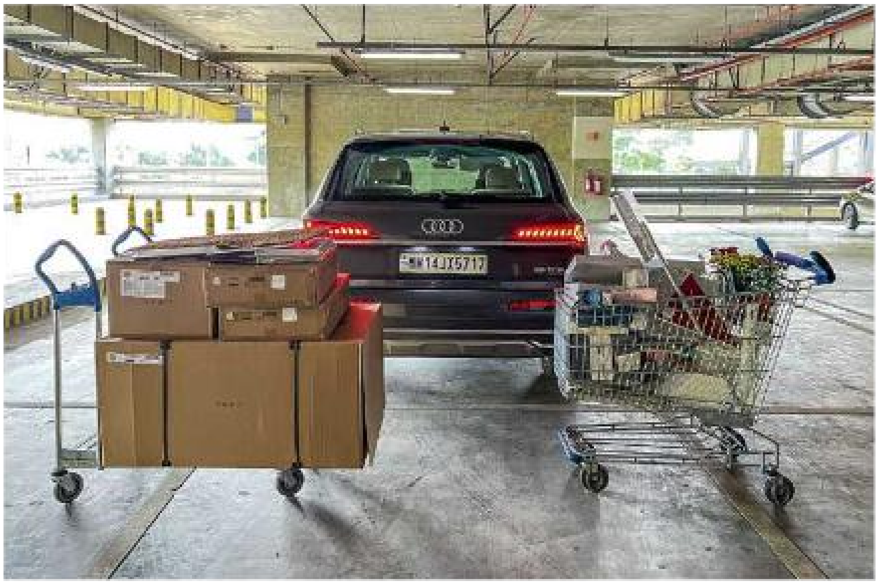
I guess that's the very thing fuelling the economy right now. What's the point in pinching pennies when another black swan event can hit at any time and without any notice? Better, then, to live in the moment and enjoy things while you can — and with the Audi Q7, my word, there was a lot to take in.

The Q7 arrived on a Sunday, the day before we were to head out to Hampi with the A8L for one of the headline features of our anniversary issue. On stories like this everybody scrambles for the writing gig because it's the writer who gets to keep the hero car while the rest of the crew struggles to keep up in whatever support car is around. But this time round I didn't need to pull rank. Aatish wanted to drive the A8L and I was happy to chase him in the Q7, in fact I was happier because — as I'm fond of saying — India is SUV country. And I am also fond of saying this — the Q7 is among the best cars you can do road trips in.

The first and most obvious reason is the ride comfort. I am not sure which has played a bigger role — the switch to 19-inch wheels or swapping to run-flat tyres — but the ride quality is definitely stiffer than what we praised the Q7 for in the past. This is

Below: Scouting for locations in Hampi. **Facing page:** Two loaded Ikea carts fit into the Q7's boot





more noticeable at low speeds, when you potter around in the city and feel a little more of the sharp cuts and ruts in the road, but once you build up speed, my word, the Q7 is imperious. It rides over everything like a charm, there's no float or wallow to complain about, and because of the high-set SUV driving position you have a great view out. It makes serious mile-munching absolutely effortless and though Aatish had a much more luxurious ride in the A8L, as you would expect of Audi's range topper, I didn't experience too much FOMO.

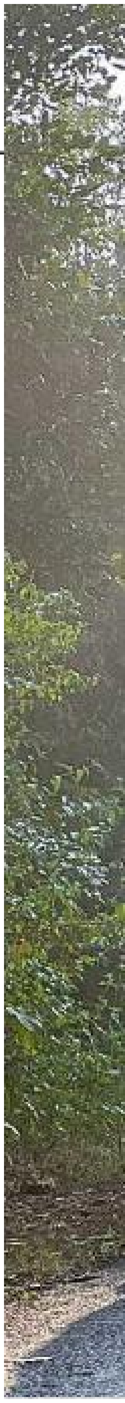
The Q7 is also quick. 335bhp and 500Nm of torque that peaks at just 1370rpm and stays flat until 4500rpm makes it effortlessly quick and very much in keeping with the character of a big SUV. In fact this is as torquey as the big TDIs we have such fond memories of, yet with a more zingy top end, a nicer engine note, and obviously much better refinement.

This is as torquey as the TDI we have such fond memories of, with obviously much better refinement

But it does come at the expense of thirst. On the run from Pune to Hampi we got 7.6kmpl, and driven more sedately it went up to just under 9kmpl. The Q7 has a healthy appetite for dino-juice, that's without question, which makes you wonder why you're daily-driving such a big SUV. And then your wife drags you to Ikea.

We spent the entire day at Ikea – I don't think anybody walks in and out of one in 10 minutes – and by the end of it we had two massive carts fully piled up, including the recliner I am, well, reclining in while typing out this piece. I took me a good 20 minutes just to load up the Q7 but with the second and third rows folded flat the Q7 swallowed up everything, the wifey even

LAZY BULL FARM



noticing some left over space and asking if we should head back in.

We did not.

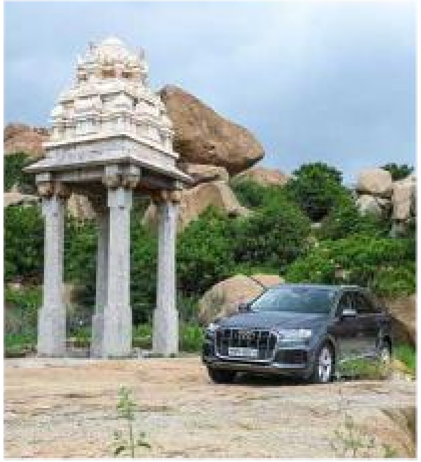
This is also where the switch to run-flats comes in handy. If you recall the earlier Q7 had a bizarre attachment in the boot to mount the space saver that ate into one of the two seats in the third row. That's now sorted, though that said the third row is strictly for kids – I remember it being a little more spacious or maybe we've just grown out of those old pants. The middle row though is lovely, plenty of space, huge sunroof adding to the sense of spaciousness, recline to take a snooze in, and it is one of those rare cars where three can sit abreast.

Dynamic mode reduces the vertical movements with no discernible reduction in the ride comfort

There's very little you miss, though that said the lack of wireless Apple CarPlay is a big miss, as is the lack of seat coolers. Asking for seat massagers would be a bit too much though, that's the job of the A8L.

Like all my daily drivers the Q7 too did multiple Mumbai-Pune expressway runs and the mandatory Pune-Goa run as well. On the latter, that's when the Q7 got a chance to stretch her legs. We always knew she could swallow up the highways but the way she goes round the Amboli hills — planted, reassuring, plenty of grip, and not too much body roll — makes drives such as this not only easy but also plenty of fun. I used Dynamic mode throughout the drive; on the highway it reduces the vertical movements with no discernible reduction in the ride comfort while in the bends it reduces the body movement and body roll while also quickening the throttle response.

Top: A breather on the way back from Goa. **Facing page:** The massive tank meant not too many trips to the fuel station despite the 8-odd kmpl fuel economy; Off-road lifts the air suspension making trips to the farm a piece of cake



Apart from crawling in city traffic I preferred Dynamic over Comfort all the time – and I was not always driving. On the return from Goa I handed the wheel to the wifey for the Kolhapur to Pune stretch while I finished off writing a full road test. Car and driver, both are surprisingly good!

Surprisingly good lights too. Of late, with the crazy traffic in both Pune and Mumbai courtesy of all the metro work, I've been doing this commute in the dead of the night – and it really is the best time to drive. No calls to disturb you, the rest of the world is fast asleep. Crank up the tunes on the excellent stereo. No traffic, either in the city or on the highway, to tear your hair over. Stunning headlamps. Cool mood lighting. And no chaos at petrol pumps so you can stretch your legs and breathe in the cool night air while 85 litres get dumped into the tank. ☒

Sirish Chandran (@SirishChandran)

Date acquired Sept 2022
Total mileage 14,781km **Mileage during test** 3150km **Costs** Nil **Overall kmpl** 8.3

Hyundai i20 N Line

Nothing like a nippy hatch for the daily commute — it just makes every day better

DRIVE HAPPY TO AND FROM WORK. It's the one thing you do every weekday of your life, yet little thought is paid into what you drive to work. You calculate mileage and resale costs and spares and service, you don't value driving dynamics enough. And that is honestly the most important factor. If resale costs top your priorities, you are looking at a depreciating asset as an investment, which is questionable in the first place. Now everyone can't afford a Porsche, but there are a handful of good performance options at affordable prices too. If you are a motorcyclist, the choices are endless, but in the car space, for a daily commute to work, you have a few. The i20 N Line tops that list, the other two being SUVS — the Venue N Line and XUV300 Turbosport. Am I missing something here? The car space at sub-15 lakh rupees is quite boring otherwise, isn't it?

Road noise has reduced considerably, grip in the dry and wet has improved too

The i20 N Line is so good, and fairly popular that it encouraged Hyundai to launch a Venue N Line, and for good reason. I've been living with the car for over six months, and over these six months, the stiff suspension has only been an asset. It took a little getting used to, but the more you drive it, the experience only gets better. Not once have I held my back after a day behind the wheel thinking, wishing it was softer. The surefootedness brings a smile every time, even at a stop light. Turning right or left to the next road, when I am the first car out at a stop light, I shift the gearbox to Sport mode, and give a healthy squirt of fuel in the cylinders, these are short bouts of joy I have every day. I smile to work and back from work, and I look forward to weekends when I take my dog for joy rides. He's also a car nut.

The thing is, the stock tyres were a bit worn out and hard after the heavy abuse they had endured over 10,000km at the wheel. We swapped them with Continental UltraContact UC6 rubber on all four wheels. Ever since, we enjoy our drives a whole lot more. Road noise has reduced considerably, grip in the dry and wet has improved too. A bit of a downside is the efficiency. Better grip comes at the cost of efficiency, marginally reducing by 0.5kmpl. I have rectified that with a switch to XP95 from regular fuel. XP95 is ₹7 costlier to a litre however the engine runs a lot smoother and efficiency has gone back up to the CEAT SecuraDrive days.

Anand Mohan *(@anandmohan2810)*

Date acquired May 2022
Total mileage 13988km **Mileage this month** 1250km **Costs this month** ₹42,500 (five tyres, alignment and balancing)
Overall kmpl 10.5kmpl

Royal Enfield Hunter 350

I ride the Royal Enfield Hunter 350 down to India Bike Week 2022 to see if it's a good bike to tour on

THE ROYAL ENFIELD HUNTER 350 IS a bike that has impressed everyone in the office. So much so that chief videographer Sachin Khot called dibs as soon as he saw the bike in Thailand during the first ride event. The last report you read was Sachin's time with the Hunter 350 in the city. Most of which was for getting his wedding preparations done. Then Sachin was off to tie the knot and I flicked the keys to the Hunter 350 from him and started having a bit of fun with it myself. The bike is a real change of pace from what I've gotten accustomed to with Royal Enfield over the last few years. So much so that I wanted to know if this agile, sporty and youthful Enfield has the quintessential thumper characteristic to be able to munch miles in comfort. To test this, we decided to ride it down to the 2022 iteration of the India Bike Week festival which after a hiatus courtesy Covid was finally back in Goa. To add some perspective we also brought along the TVS Ronin, its only competitor and did a comparison test which you should see in the next issue of **evo India**. Now as soon as you cover some ground, the Hunter 350's short ride oriented intentions become very apparent. The seat is not really the most comfortable for long days in the saddle. You begin to settle into it fairly quickly and your bum starts to become sore. This is further amplified by the stiff suspension setup and the far-from-perfect roads between Goa and Pune. Thankfully, the rider's triangle is pretty conducive to standing up and stretching, which alleviates some of the soreness. But this same stiff setup really comes into its own on Amboli ghat. The bike is nimble, agile and handled the twisties rather well, putting a nice wide grin on my face. As far as cruising on the highway, apart from my sore rear quarters the only real complaint I had was the mirrors that were vibrating at cruising speeds. The rest of the bike was rather refined and stress free. I could sit at 100kmph all day long and have a bit more left in store for a quick overtake. All this while getting roughly 33kmpl. So this definitely wasn't the ideal bike for the trip to Goa and back but the bike definitely gave me the thrills of pure, unadulterated motoring and isn't that what Royal Enfields are all about? ◼

Karan Ramgopal (@karanramgopal)

As soon as you cover some ground, the Hunter 350's short ride oriented intentions become very apparent

Date acquired September 2022 **Total mileage** 2261km **Mileage this month** 1541km **Costs this month** Nil **Overall kmpl** 33kmpl

TUNED

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH STI

ORGANISED CHAOS
#IMZILLA
#WILDCHILD
MH-02-BH-0555

by ROHIT NALAWADE
PHOTOGRAPHY *by* NIRMEET PATIL & JASH KOTHARI

10 SECOND CAR

What you see here is an 1100+bhp drag car.
Meet India's wildest Nissan GT-R!

IT'S 4AM AND AS I WAIT FOR NIRMEET the shutterbug to turn up, the cold air has breached my hoodie and put me in a grumpy mood. I hate early morning wake up calls. Don't get me wrong, it's the best time to head out for a drive, but the novelty of waking up at an ungodly hour is lost on me because as a motor noter, this is usually the time you'd find us heading out for shoots or catching flights. But today is different, and my grumpiness gave way to an unusually chipper smile as I saw the silver silhouette roar past me on the other side of the highway. 20 seconds later, that silver silhouette has negotiated a U-turn and has stopped dead in front of me. Imran Majid has coolly turned up in what is India's fastest GT-R. I suddenly don't hate 4am so much.

Before I go overboard with the superlatives, I have to put on my journalist's hat and provide you with some perspective. I turned up to hook up with the GT-R in our long-term i20 N Line. The peppy little turbo-petrol makes 118bhp and is a hoot to drive. The GT-R? It makes power equivalent to 10 of those. Gulp. That's 1100+bhp and a quarter-mile of 9.7 seconds, making it the fastest time ever at the Valley Run drag races. Just ogling at a 10-second car has my mind going into a tizzy – this is as close to real life *Fast and Furious* as you can get.

No time to waste then. Nirmeet and his friend Jash whip out their cameras and get on with the business of papping the GT-R as we head to a spot that Nirmeet reckons will get us our hero shot. I'm tailing the GT-R, the taps not yet opened up by Imran so we can bag our pictures, and I cannot help but be tongue-tied at the sight of the JDM legend. The GT-R might not be as seductive as a Porsche 911, but it is a revered shape nevertheless. The front of this particular example gets naked carbonfibre for the fenders and the bumpers as well as the bonnet, and contrasting with the rest of the silver bodywork, it gives off a vibe you don't normally associate with heavily modded builds. Honesty.

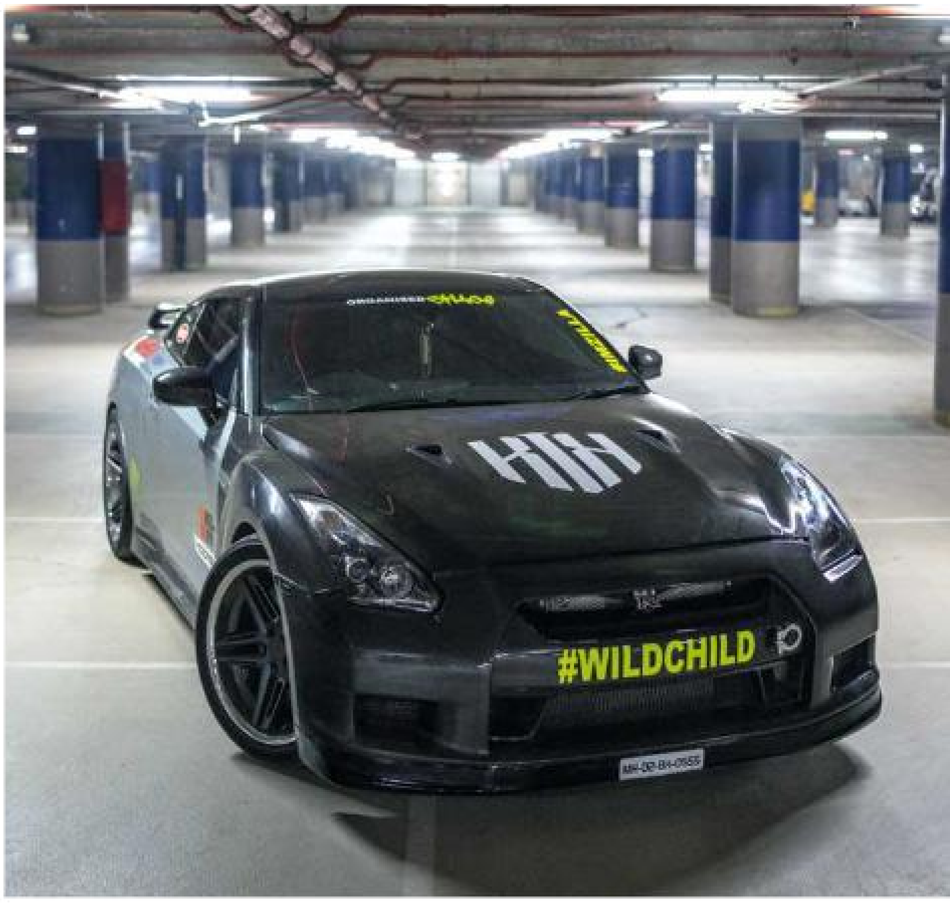
This is a car that is used every day, often running on the same Toyo Proxes R888R competition tyres that helped it set a blistering quarter-mile time at the Valley Run, and it makes no apologies for it. The bassy note of the exhaust just about flies under the radar of even the most enthusiastic cop and the car looks, sounds and feels every inch a JDM fanboy's wet dream. There are plenty of stickers too, the one saying 'Wildchild' being the most eye-catching of them all, and it's impossible to miss it, a helpful trait, considering that even with a small flex of the accelerator, Imran leaves me behind in the dust.

There's a reason behind the reverence that the GT-R commands. The 3.8-litre VR28DETT V6 is a seriously capable mill that can put out large horsepower outputs reliably. Imran tells me that the engine continues to make use of the standard block and heads, but apart from that, this engine has been fully built out — and it still has room for extracting more power. Imran tells me that this was the first ever GT-R to be imported into the country way back in 2008, and he was lucky to be one of the first ones to see the car being unloaded at the port back then. Incidentally, the same car happened to land at Kikshift, a performance shop that Imran runs in Mumbai along with his friends Keki Modi and Hormazd Siganporia, and Imran knew he just had to have that car. It was already heavily modded and only being used for highway runs. Imran tells me that with its immaculate condition, he had only two ways to get the car from the previous owner. "Either I could frighten the daylights out of him, tell him the car is a goner. But I chose the second option and told him 'Boss, I really like the car, and really want to have it.' Luckily the chap was very kind!"

THIS ENGINE HAS BEEN FULLY BUILT OUT AND STILL HAS ROOM FOR EXTRACTING MORE POWER

Imran proceeds to tell me that this build has been an ongoing one for nearly 10 years now, and all that power is largely down to the efforts of Alphalogic Performance in Dubai. The GT-R now gets beefier pistons, new camshafts, 1800cc fuel injectors and an upgraded fuel pump system to match. Alphalogic Performance actually did their R&D for their GT-R performance upgrades on this car, with the original engine being stroked to 4.1-litres at one point to see the performance gains. That was not the most fruitful of efforts, and Imran's car has received an engine swap while being tuned to run on bio-ethanol,

Clockwise from right: Speedometer going to 300+kmph not just for show in a GT-R!; decals emblazoned prominently all over; Kirkey drag racing seat made from aluminium. **Facing page:** The silhouette is one-of-a-kind, with carbonfibre fenders contrasting with the silver paint of this GT-R



BUILD LIST

This tuned Nissan GT-R build includes the following parts:

- AMS pistons
- Manley rods
- Cometic head gasket
- Ferrea Racing valve train
- ARP studs kit
- Kelford camshafts
- Injector Dynamics 1800cc injectors
- AMS Performance Alpha 12 turbo kit
- AMS Performance intercooler with piping
- MoTec M1 engine management system
- Custom TCM tuning
- Fore Innovations triple pump fuel system
- AMS Performance fuel rail with regulator
- Flex fuel tuning
- Dodson Extreme Duty full gear set
- Dodson Promax 10 plate clutch kit
- Dodson Stage 5 package

the percentage of the fuel mixture allowing the GT-R to break the 1000bhp barrier. The heat shield is lined with gold plating too, to dissipate heat more effectively!

With great power you also need the components to handle it safely, and the transmission gear set as well as the clutch plate were replaced for purpose-built units from Dodson. "The team from Alphalogic Performance really came through with the build, they even overnighted parts when I needed them for a race," says Imran. Expert tuner Rob Harper came through with the tune in a jiffy too, and with some of the best names in the business working on the GT-R, Imran was assured of its awesome performance. The latter I'm promptly reminded of as Imran makes a mischievous pull in the parking lot we're shooting at, forcing us to beat a hasty retreat before the heat is onto us. Good thing that the GT-R is an ideal getaway car then.

We haven't yet bagged all the shots we need so we proceed to roar towards town. Imran is clearly chuffed with his little misdemeanour, and even with me lead-footing it in our long-termer and trying to keep a respectable

Clockwise from top: Imran Majid from Kikshift admires the engine bay of his wild child; gorgeous quad-exhausts on the GT-R; 20-inch Ferrada alloy wheels wrapped in Toyo Proxes competition-spec rubber — the same ones that helped it make history at the Valley Run!

pace, the GT-R flies by like I've been standing still. That's what it must've felt like to face a humiliating defeat at the Valley Run up against this road rocket. Having had a peek into the interior earlier, I can visualise Imran's POV as he blitzes past traffic, in the typically Japanese cabin. There are scores of buttons on the centre console, which never seemed to leave the '90s, there's all manner of geeky information on display that would make a rookie pilot uneasy — there's even a CD player for crying out loud. But I sense Imran is paying heed to none of that as he snakes past whatever little traffic is present at a considerable clip, cocooned in the Kirkey drag racing seat made of aluminium.

After driving through the Bandra-Worli sea link, a drive that was dispatched with speed and ease, Imran enlightens me on his Valley Run experience. His GT-R was running a completely street setup without any weight reduction. Imran tells me that for his 9.7-second record run, he had to sacrifice outright speed and focus more on the launch to achieve a perfect launch with the car squatting on its rear wheels in the pictures. "I actually lifted off the throttle at 350 metres, because the front end of the car was getting too light and felt like it wanted to take off!"

THIS GT-R WAS RUNNING A COMPLETELY STREET SETUP WITHOUT ANY WEIGHT REDUCTION

Imran isn't a stranger to fast cars, one of his other rides is an equally-epic E60 M5, but it's the GT-R that he warms up to so much more. "This car, it's the perfect reflection of my personality," he says, proudly pointing to the 'Wildchild decals. And while I didn't dare to tame the monster, I couldn't help but be in awe, sitting in the driver's seat in the middle of a desolate parking lot with the desire of playing real life *Tokyo Drift* with Imran's 'Imzilla'. I resisted the urge to rev it and listen to the 1100bhp that had got me out of bed that morning in the first place. Because had I given into my desire, this 10 second GT-R would've taken me for a wild ride!

This Nissan GT-R was built at Alphalogic Performance in Dubai and maintained at Kikshift in Mumbai

SPECIFICATION

Engine	3799cc, VR28DETT V6, turbo-petrol
Suspension	Stock suspension
Gearbox	7-speed dual-clutch automatic
Tyres	Toyo Proxes R888R 285/35/ZR20 (F) Toyo Proxes R888R 325/30/ZR20 (R)
Brakes	Endless Sport competition brakes
Power	1050 to 1150bhp (depending on fuel)
Torque	900-950Nm (claimed)
0-100kmph	NA

#WILDCHILD
MH 02 BH 0555

TUNED X STI CLASSIFIEDS

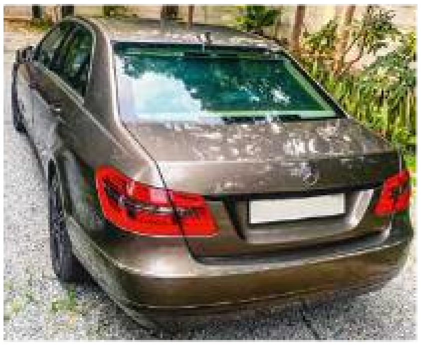
Inspired by the cars featured in Tuned? Here are the coolest cars you can get your hands on!

To get information on the listings contact Robesh at +91 91130 84539

REQUIREMENT

PORSCHE 911 CARRERA / S

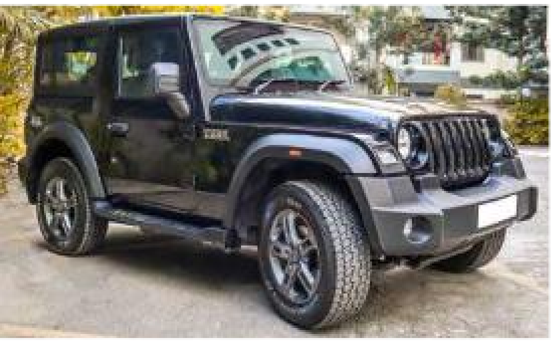
Year of manufacture	2016+
Expected price	₹2.5 crore



FOR SALE

MERCEDES-BENZ E250 CDI

Year of manufacture	2011
Mileage	85,000km
Owners	2
State of registration	Karnataka (KA)
Insurance	Valid
Expected price	₹13 lakh



FOR SALE

MAHINDRA THAR 4x4 AT HARDTOP

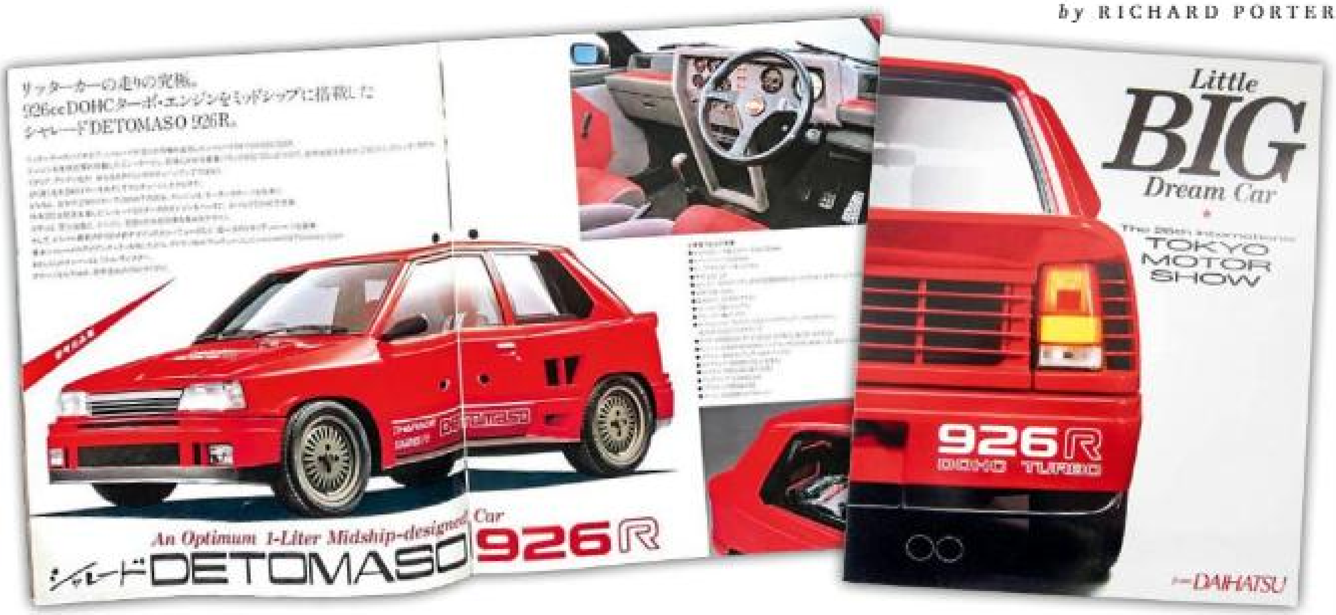
Year of manufacture	2022
Mileage	3,800km
Owners	1
State of registration	Karnataka (KA)
Insurance	Valid
Expected price	₹19 lakh

REQUIREMENT

LAMBORGHINI HURACÁN SPYDER

Year of manufacture	2017+
Expected price	₹2.5 crore

by RICHARD PORTER



DOA: DAIHATSU CHARADE 926R

This mid-engined miniature hero was another rally-ready special lost with the cancellation of Group B

FOR A PAGE COVERING CARS THAT came close to production only to be culled at the prototype stage, the Group B rally years are fertile ground, and here we are again with another obscurity from that amazing era of homologation specials.

Despite the Japanese name above the door, the story of this car is also rooted in Italy and Innocenti, the Milanese company that made BMC Minis under licence, was bought by British Leyland in 1972, and in 1974 introduced its own Mini, using the same old underparts but dressed in a crisp Bertone-styled body. This was such a convincing update that BL considered selling it through its own channels, only abandoning this plan because the Italian remix had less interior space than the British original and Longbridge marketing people couldn't stomach such a retrograde step.

In 1976, Innocenti was sold to Alejandro de Tomaso, he of Vallelunga and Pantera fame, and the company continued making its own Mini until the start of the '80s when its deal with BL ended. At this point De Tomaso used the opportunity to develop a new chassis for its Mini and set out to find a more modern engine for it, as well as a way of distributing it across Europe without BL's help. Enter Daihatsu, which had an up-to-date three-cylinder motor that would fit in the car's stubby nose and a small Euro dealer network through which the updated car could be sold. And this, in a long-winded way, is how we end up at the rally special you see here.

The original Daihatsu Charade of 1977 had punched above its delicate weight in rallying and in 1981 Daihatsu presented a one-off turbocharged version which it billed as being made in association with its new friends at De Tomaso. For the second-generation Charade of 1983, a turbocharged model became part of the range and was homologated for Group A rallying the following year. Daihatsu wanted to aim higher, however, and for the 1985 season worked in partnership with De Tomaso to create a new variant, the 200-off Charade 926 Turbo, its name reflecting a capacity drop from 993cc to 926cc so that, when subjected to the turbo engine multiplication factor of 1.4, it would drop neatly into Group B's sub-1.3-litre class. But the Japanese company's rallying dreams were bigger still and at the 1985 Tokyo motor show it revealed the 926R, again touted as a co-production with De Tomaso.

IT HAD THE POTENTIAL TO MONSTER THE COMPETITION

The new rally machine used a modified version of the same 926cc turbocharged three-cylinder, now making 118bhp, but the big difference was that the engine sat in the middle of the car, driving the rear wheels. And this wasn't the only change because the 926R also had double-wishbone suspension, a wider track, a bespoke shell that used only the doors and roof of the regular Charade, and a functional, cliff-faced dashboard, all the better to carry multiple extra dials in the driver's sightline. In the B/9 category for cars of 1299cc or less the 926R had the potential to monster the front-engined, front-drive competition, its modest power output balanced against a claimed weight of 800kg for the road-trimmed prototype and the possibility of whittling that down towards the 675kg minimum for the competition version. Sadly, the car would never get to see a special stage.

The story of the 926R's demise is a familiar one for Group B prototypes: Daihatsu and De Tomaso were keen but the abrupt cancellation of the series in 1986 brought the project to an end. The car could have been homologated for Group A instead, but the requirement for 5,000 road cars instead of Group B's manageable 200 made the idea untenable and what could have been an amazing 7/8-scale Renault 5 Turbo instead became a forgotten footnote in rallying history. ☒

TRIED & TESTED

THE BEST MOTORING PRODUCTS, PUT THROUGH THEIR PACES BY EVO INDIA

by MANDAR SAWANT PHOTOGRAPHY *by* AVDHOOT A KOLHE

CEAT CrossDrive AT

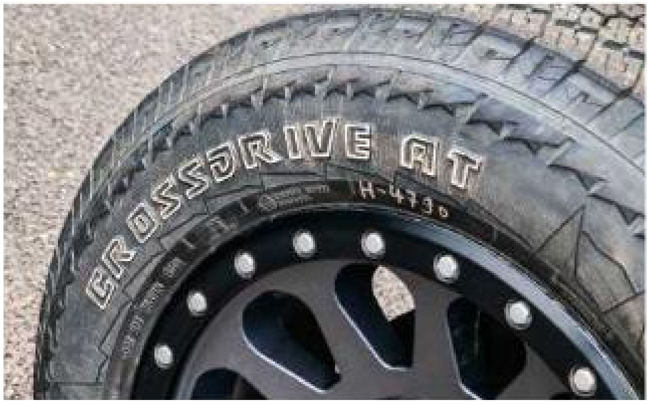
We fitted a set of CEAT CrossDrive ATs to our long-term Thar, to improve its performance both on and off the road

SOMEBODY ONCE SAID THAT 'POWER is nothing without control' and an 18-year-old me would certainly agree. Back in 2020 when the world had slowed down and all the streets were empty due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I took my uncle's little hatchback out for a spin on a cold night. Channelling my inner Walter Röhrl, I made an amateur mistake, taking a corner a bit too fast on old bald tyres, inviting understeer. The result? A slightly damaged banyan tree and a heavily damaged front-end of that poor little Suzuki. Lesson learnt. From that day on I have made it a point to check all the tyres of every car that I drive before leaving for a journey and so should you.

Tyres are the most important, and most overlooked part of any car. Think about it for a second — they are the only point of contact between your car and the road. And their job is to provide optimum grip while supporting the weight and all the physics associated with making your car move. All cars operate at the limit of their tyre's grip and a really good tyre helps you extract the true performance of your car. It might make a gazillion horsepower, but all of that is worthless if you don't have a good set of tyres that put down all the power onto the tarmac below.

So, to highlight the significance of great tyres and see how they affect and improve on-road performance as well as off-road capability, we slapped a fresh set of CEAT CrossDrive ATs onto our long-term Mahindra Thar. I spent a week driving the Thar everywhere and here's how it went.

CEAT
CROSSDRIVE AT
MH01DP7370



OFF-ROAD CONQUEROR

OUR LONG-TERM MAHINDRA THAR RACKS UP some serious miles every month. It is used for commuting in Pune, does countless highway runs to Mumbai to cover launches and also doubles up as our support car on shoots. It also travels to far-flung locales every now and then, to discover the roads less taken, and despite the demanding routine that we've subjected it to, we never feel uncomfortable behind its wheel because of its great ride quality and handling.

It was shod with CEAT CZAR AT tyres when it arrived at the **evo** office and after clocking over 25,000km with them, we have a pretty clear idea of the comfort and off-roading ability that those tyres possess. However, Mahindra has officially replaced the CZAR ATs with the CEAT CrossDrive ATs as the OE tyres for the Thar. So when CEAT sent a set of the 225/65 R18 CrossDrive ATs for our Thar, I used it for a week of daily shenanigans, including some serious off-roading, and I am very impressed by how they fared.

Much to my surprise, it was the off-road performance of the CrossDrive ATs that impressed me more than anything else. We put them through a series of obstacles on a trail, including axle articulation, twisting and even a water-wading pit and they never skipped a beat. The Thar conquered every obstacle with little to no drama and even the people at the trail, with competition-spec 4x4s, were amazed by the capability of these tyres. The CrossDrive ATs feature a special block pattern that throws out dirt and that is what helps them grip better in slushy conditions. This is an all-terrain tyre that can easily help you conquer an intermediate trail without breaking a sweat.

ON-ROAD POTENT

AN AGGRESSIVE BLOCK PATTERN RESULTS in better grip off tarmac, but more often than not it also makes for poor on-road characteristics. But that isn't the case with the CrossDrive ATs. There's none of the noise or poor handling that you might associate with a tyre that performs well off-road. In fact, following their installation, I was immediately struck by how much quieter they are than the CZARs. SUVs such as the Thar which have a ladderframe chassis tend to have a bouncy low speed ride and that pitter patter trait has been refined. The kick from the rear suspension is diminished and the ride compliance is much better. The result is a plusher ride. Not to forget the additional grip from the CrossDrive ATs also makes you feel more confident behind the wheel, especially in wet conditions.

One thing that's very cool is how these tyres transform our Thar's appearance. The dynamic pattern and the aggressive stance that these CrossDrive tyres offer, make our Thar look a lot cooler and meaner, which we personally love as it really makes you stand out in traffic, and no one gets in your way. That's one thing that Ravi Bhalla, one of the founding members of Sahyadri Offroaders who took us off-roading to test the tyres also pointed out. He said, "Form to me is just as important as function and I have really liked the tread pattern and the overall look of these tyres."

Ravi liked them so much that he ordered a set right in front of me. And I will certainly agree with him. It isn't just a styling gimmick. If your daily commute takes you through notorious traffic jams such as those the city of Pune is plagued with, you'll find that a mean-looking Thar gets through traffic a lot quicker than a tiny little hatchback or even a sedan.

> **I WAS IMMEDIATELY STRUCK BY HOW MUCH QUIETER THEY ARE THAN THE CZARS**

VERDICT

The CEAT CrossDrive ATs prove that with the simple task of slapping on better rubber, you can substantially improve your SUV. They've made our Thar a better daily driver and given it more off-roadability. These are the perfect all-terrain tyres for your SUV. ☒

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AVO SUSPENSION KIT

₹1.1 lakh (inclusive of GST)
www.arkamotorsports.com

THE MAHINDRA THAR IS OUR MOST tinkered with fleet car. Among all the vehicles sold in the country, the Thar is arguably the most modified vehicle too. Almost no owner wants the Thar stock for a long time, and so there's a long list of upgrades easily available for every major mechanical component in the Thar. First we got a dieselTronic ECU fitted, we followed that up by indulging in a stunning set of Fuel Off-road alloy wheels, and recently got a new set of CEAT CrossDrive tyres that have improved grip and reduced road noise. Our next upgrade is a new suspension kit. AVO, a motorsport-inspired design, engineering and manufacturing company from the UK specialises in suspension and has made a performance kit for the Thar, that can be bought through Coimbatore-based Arka Motorsports in India.

Arka — who have a massive motorsport lineage — sent us the suspension kit to swap with the stock setup. We swapped the dampers in front and both the springs and dampers for the rear and will be testing the suspension out across terrain and conditions to find the right setup on different terrain. It took us a few hours to install the kit and a few more to find the right initial set up. There is going to be a whole lot of tinkering to be done because not only do you get 16 levels of adjustability for bump and rebound, these aren't one-time or closed dampers. You can re-valve the dampers to your liking if the initial 16 clicks don't give you the right setting. The manufacturer prescribed setting is 11 in front and 13 in the rear, and it can be easily adjusted without jacking the Thar up making you feel like a rally driver setting up a car before a stage.

In its stock setting, the suspension has noticeably reduced pitch and roll under braking and cornering respectively, transforming the Thar's high speed ride and handling compared to the stock suspension. I feel more confident in corners, over broken surfaces and at high speed with the AVO kit — the benefits of a stiffer set up. I can go softer to improve low speed ride but, with the remap, the Thar is quicker and needs the surefootedness this setup offers. In fact, the adjustability is so transformative, I can choose a stiffer or softer setup (go up or down by two clicks) for a specific ride in a couple of minutes. A highway run for example can be done with a stiffer ride, reach a trail, soften it up, finish the trail and set it up for the road again — which will need to be done when we take it off-road because this setup is a bit too stiff for the rutted stuff. That flexibility makes the Thar so much better as a daily driver, the ₹1.1 lakh kit almost seems like a value investment.

> **IT HAS NOTICEABLY REDUCED PITCH AND ROLL UNDER BRAKING AND CORNERING**

Arka Motorsports has partners all over the country to fit this and we did it at Ultimate AutoTec in Pune run by our technical editor Byram Godrej. The company is offering an 18 month warranty on the kit, and if you don't like the current set up adjustability, re-valving can be done to make it work with your Thar. This is especially helpful for Thars with other performance mods as the stock AVO set up is done on a stock Thar. Mechanically altering your suspension to suit your driving style and performance is arguably the best modification one can do, and even future proof the suspension for more performance tuning. We will be giving detailed set up updates on the **evo India** and **Engage 4x4** Instagram handles as we drive the Thar across different terrain. ☒

Anand Mohan *(@anandmohan2810)*

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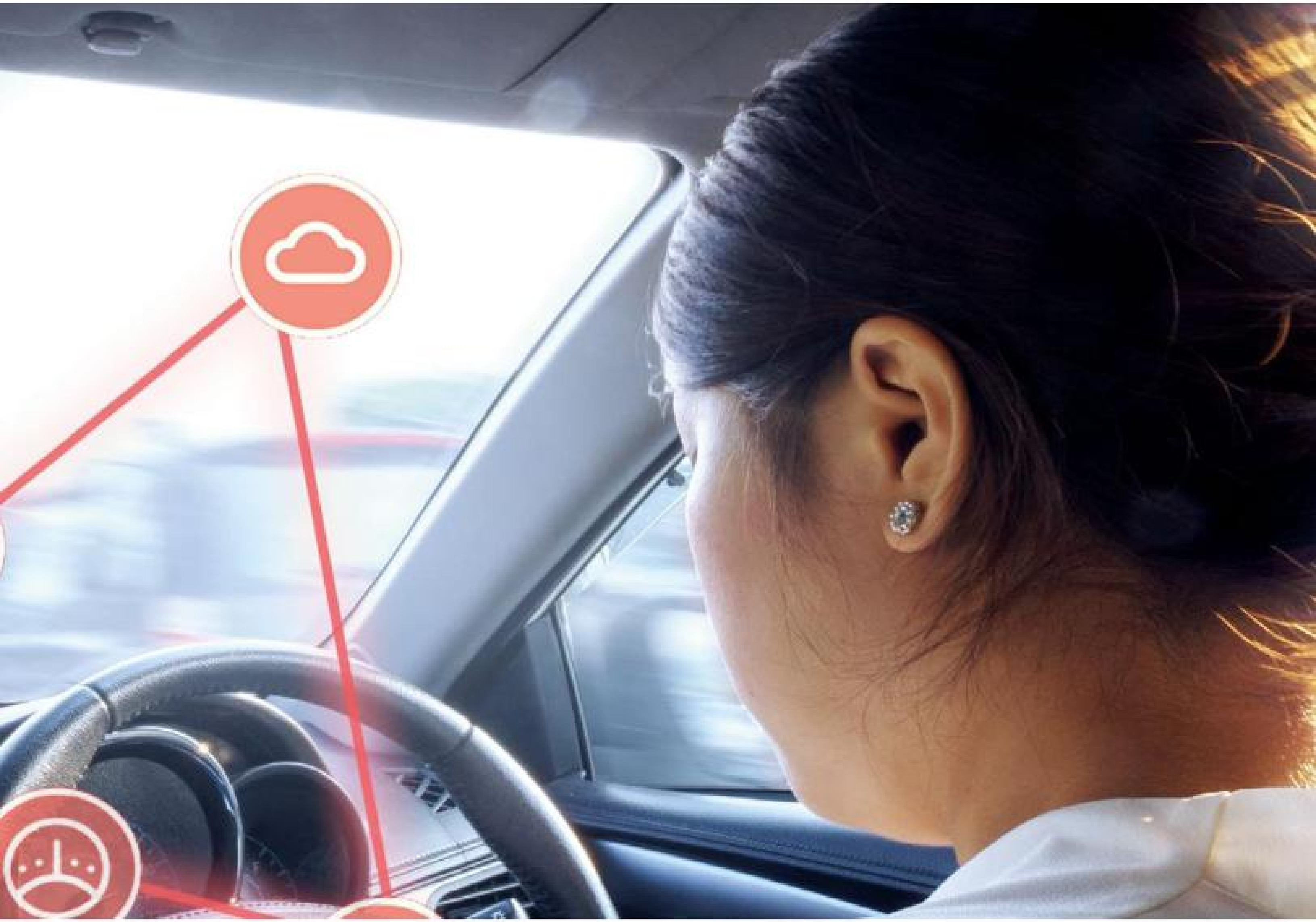

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RYNOX NAVIGATOR TAIL BAG 50L

₹6,350/-(as tested)
www.rynoxgears.com

RYNOX SENT OVER THE NAVIGATOR Tail Bag 50L to us a while back, but we finally got a chance to put it to the test on our recent trip to Goa to attend the India Bike Week 2022. Its 50-litre capacity meant that it was more than enough to handle all of my luggage for the weekend and then some. The bag comes with a bunch of pockets and compartments and Rynox also gives three dry bags, one 24 litres in capacity and two 12-litres to better organise the contents of your luggage. The luggage in the main compartment sits underneath two flaps with pouches, two netted and two completely sealed, giving you more space to keep small things that you would want to access on the go without having to take everything out. The bag also comes with a muck cover to help keep mud and other gunk out of your bag when out on the road. The bag is primarily made up of 1000D Invista Cordura which makes it rather durable and resistant to abrasion, meaning it should keep your bag intact should you have a minor fall. The bag relies on a series of straps for its mounting. One set is to be mounted under your seat and on the pillion foot peg mounts with loops for the main straps. And then the other straps are looped on to the mounted straps and clip on to the bag on four points. The whole mechanism is a little finicky and doesn't give the bag the secure mounting that you would like. Once Rynox sorts this out, this bag will make for a very solid offering for people who tour often, especially considering how much it costs.

> **THE LUGGAGE IN THE MAIN COMPARTMENT SITS UNDER TWO FLAPS WITH POUCHES**

***Karan Ramgopal** (@karanramgopal)*

FITBIT INSPIRE 3

₹8,999/-(as tested)
www.fitbit.com

THE FITBIT INSPIRE 3 IS THE MIDDLE of the line fitness tracker band in the company's range. It gets most of the features that you get in the Charge 5 but with a slightly smaller footprint and price tag as well. The band uses a bright, colour touchscreen which is easy to interact with even in harsh sunlight. To wake the screen, you can either set it up such that you lift your wrist or you squeeze the watch from either side. I would've preferred a tap to wake function because I wear a few bracelets and it becomes a bit of a task squeezing the body. In terms of activity tracking, it has all the major trackers you would expect a watch of this range to have and in my time with it the sensors are mostly accurate. Every now and then however I did notice that the step tracker would even count steps when I was riding a motorcycle. But this was an occasional glitch, something that Fitbit should be able to address with an OTA update. If you've seen me, you'd know that fitness, as much as it should be, isn't really high on my list of priorities. I use a band such as this primarily for notifications, which is why I don't wear a full-fledged smart watch. On that front, the notification delivery on the band is rather impressive with a strong vibration motor and barely any latency between notifications. Another feature I've really come to appreciate is the ability to accept a call on the band. This comes in handy when you're wearing headphones and just want to quickly answer the call. At the price point, the Fitbit Inspire 3 comes with enough fitness features, six months of premium for free and it makes for a good option for someone who doesn't want a smartphone on their wrist.

***Karan Ramgopal** (@karanramgopal)*

12
58
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73

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evo CAR OF THE YEAR 2022

Scan the QR code to pre-order the January 2023 issue by SIRISH CHANDRAN

Mercedes-Benz B-Class

With the launch of the GLB, now's a good time to look back at its spiritual predecessor, the original, small, practical Merc

GOING BY RECENT TRENDS IT looks like everything Mercedes-Benz touches turns to gold, except they've also had their howlers. Remember the R-Class? There was a chap in my lane who had bought one — one of the old Merc fleet cars acquired for a song — and even he didn't have many kind words for the seven-seater MPV designed to look like an SUV.

And then there was the B-Class.

Objectively this was on point. 'Practicality of a hatchback and the space of a saloon', said Mercedes and truth be told this actually went one step better by offering the space and convenience of a small van. The seating position was nice and upright so that everybody was comfortable. There were no problems with the ground clearance, which would be an area of concern when the CLA eventually came around. And it had better ride comfort compared to both the A- and CLA-Class that were really tight and stiff. The B-Class looked like a master stroke to cash in on the craze for entry-level luxury cars, appealing to the head over the heart.

But then, who buys a Merc for purely practical reasons?

MERCEDES SENSIBLY OPTED NOT TO WASTE ANY EFFORT ON THE THIRD-GEN B-CLASS

Mercedes had missed the bus with compact SUVs and ten years ago it had no GLA to take on the X1 and Q3 that were raking in the volumes for BMW and Audi, leaving Mercedes in the second runner-up position in the Indian luxury car market. The B-Class was a stop-gap solution and the marketing chaps, inventively, slapped it with a 'Sports Tourer' label. But nobody was fooled. This was clearly and obviously an MPV, and there was no way an MPV was going to be remotely as desirable as an SUV, especially not one that was pure FWD. To counter that Mercedes even priced the B180 aggressively, the ex-showroom price of ₹21.5 lakh making it the cheapest car by a luxury brand in India. A year later came the diesel with 132bhp (compared to the 1.6-litre petrol's 120bhp) making the ₹3 lakh price jump seem worthwhile. Two years later came a sharper face lift, but by then the GLA was out and Mercedes started clawing back volumes. The B-Class was left to focus even more on the practicality front, customers responded with a clear, 'No, thank you', and Mercedes sensibly opted not to waste any effort on the third-gen B-Class, instead bringing in the GLB a couple of segments up the ladder.

As an aside, ten years later the cheapest Mercedes is now the A-Class saloon, costing twice as much as that B-Class, and Mercedes are now in such a dominant position in the luxury car space that can claim — and do exercise — a price premium over its rivals. They've got the Midas touch.

*This is not a page for vintage cars. We will drive modern classics, made in India, and we're going to apply the only sensible filter we can think of — to drive cars that came with seat belts.

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